BEM

THE Comics News FANZINE

30¢ #22

HUNT EMERSON

BEM-22 January 1979

incorporating Fantasy Trader

editor & publisher: Martin Lock
consulting editor: Mike Cruden

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Mike Cruden.

DEADLINE FOR FT 34: January 30th 1979

BACK ISSUES: The first eleven issues of Bem are sold out. Bems 12-16 have a 15p cover price, Bems 17-19 have a 20p cover price, Bem-20 a 25p cover price, Bem-2 a 30p cover price. For one back issue please add 7p to cover postage -- add 3p for each following issue. If you are buying at least four Bems and subscribing (at £ .50 for 5 big issues), then the back issues are post free--or you can buy all ten Bem back issues for £1.80, or get them and a 5-issue subscription for £3.20. Make cheques and postal orders for Bem payable to M. Lock, please.

Martin Lock.

NOTES: Contributors, including people whose letters of comment are printed, are sent a complimentary copy of the issue of Bem their work is in--if they have a subscription, it is extended by one issue. Please enclose your full address in any letter, therefore--if you want a personal reply, remember to enclose return postage (i.e. 7p). Comments in "Reaction" identified in "/( )/" are by Mike Cruden, unless otherwise indicated. Letters, art, enquiries, magazines for review, etc should be sent to Martin Lock.

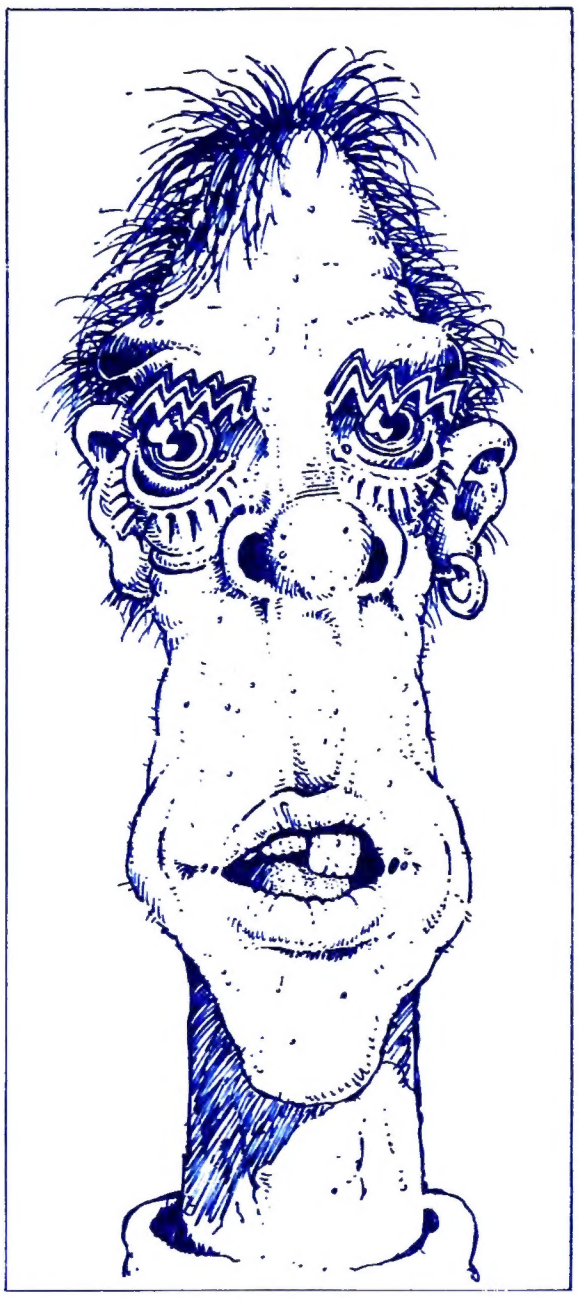
NEWS AT BEM

It seems strange not to have a price rise to talk about this time, after recent times--or an increase in the number of pages, come to that. However, we do have a new size for Bem, as at last we go to the standard A4 size. Our previous printer couldn't print any larger size of sheet than 10½" by 16½", but the new firm can print the A3 sheets needed for the new, bigger Bem--or is it the new, bigger than ever Bem?

Actually, a number of pages had to be prepared before I knew what size Bem was going to be, which is one of the perils of trying to keep to a regular schedule. That's why a number of pages have rather large margins at the top and bottom of the page. However, next time the extra height will give Bem extra space to play with--by my calculations, that extra inch or so gives us the equivalent of three more pages per issue!

This time, we've got for you two main articles, on a certain well-known SF film (page 7) and on Robert Crumb and his many creations (page 9); Reaction is a full six pages; Howard Siegel tells us what we missed in the "Silver Age" of comics; Kathleen Glancy goes boldly where very few girls have gone before; Reg Uspatoff gives a dramatic view of Marvel's possible future; and of course Ruan Lanihorne, Thundermole, Gleitzman, and Ed Sallis are on hand as usual, plus the review squad and the usual bunch of artists whose job it is to brighten up the spaces between the words.

The illustration on the right here is a self-portrait by our cover artist this time, Hunt Emerson; as I'm sure you all know, Hunt is just about the most accomplished and popular artist working in the British underground comics scene these days; he's done posters, comix, covers for music papers, and a lot more, and now he's done an outstanding cover for Bem--I'd like to thank him for finally giving in to my nagging, he's really made this Bem look good, I just hope the contents don't pale too much by comparison!



Of course, last issue's cover artist, Russ Nicholson, has got some pretty good work in Bem this time, and in Fantasy Trader--in fact, he's done a rather nice Patrick McGoohan "Prisoner" cover for the current issue of FT, and there are two more FT covers by Russ in my files too. As I keep casually mentioning, subscribers to Bem get sent copies of Fantasy Trader free of charge--it has lots of ads, including some nice comics for sale, plus articles and art in a style similar to (but subtly different from) Bem, and since Bem by post costs exactly the same as in the shops, it makes subscribing to Bem quite a bargain! My old friend Jonn Hay is helping with FT now, in an attempt to inject more personality into it; I hope that you'll be pleased with the direction Jonn, Mike and I will be heading FT in. If you don't subscribe to Bem, you can send me 12 pence in stamps for a copy, or keep an eye open for it at marts or in one or two comics shops, where it sells for a mere five pence.

From this issue, by the way, Bem is once more being mailed unfolded in big, A4 envelopes--the main reason we changed to narrower envelopes, with Bem folded, was that people were complaining that the post office was folding the envelopes anyway, and generally chewing up the edges and delivering Bem in less than mint condition, but if you're willing to take the risk, then so be it. I agree that folded or rolled fanzines can be difficult to read--so here we are, flat again! What's an extra penny an envelope between friends, after all?

Talking of subscribers and subscriptions, I'm quite often asked by people how long their subscription has left to run. There's no great danger of being suddenly Bemless, as I do always put in a letter on the subject of sending me money with the final issue of a subscription; however, if you're suddenly rich before the crunch comes, and want to add five more issues to your entitlement, you can always check on the envelope Bem arrives in to see where you stand. You'll find, in the bottom right-hand corner of the envelope, a number; it's the number of the last issue of Bem you're paid up for.

Producing an issue of Bem every two months, particularly with today's larger pages and smaller type, is very nearly a full-time job these days--it makes everything a bit of a rush, and means that some things are done the quickest way, not the best way. However, as Bem only appears five times a year, sometimes I can take a few extra weeks between Bems; and so it will be with the gap between this issue and the next, which I intend to be almost three months; expect Bem 23 in mid-March, hopefully in time to make its debut at the Birmingham Comic Mart on March 10th. This gives everyone a little longer to prepare their work for next issue; if you want to contribute to the review section, you've got until February 2nd to get your work to me (not too long before that or it'll be too out of date by the time it's printed), while letters for Reaction should get to me at least a week or two before that. Of course, there's no reason to wait until then if you want to write a letter to Bem; the earlier letters always stand a better chance of being printed. Also, if you want to put an ad in Bem, the sooner you get in touch with me the better, although the finished ad itself wouldn't be needed until early February; ads in Fantasy Trader are cheaper, of course, and reach all of Bem's subscribers, making them better if you're trying to sell comics by post -- details are over on the left of this page.

People tend to talk of "the Big Five" comics fanzines--but the last twelve months haven't been kind to them. In fact, of the five (Bem, Comics Unlimited, Comic Media News International, Fantasy Advertiser International, and The Panelologist), only CMNI and Bem have appeared with any regularity this year; both CU and Panelologist have been conspicuous by their absence recently, and when FAI proved to be too much of a burden for Colin Campbell, the nearest to a continuation that could be arranged was a few stencilled sheets of ads put out by the "Weird Fantasy" comics shop in South London under the title of "Weird Fantasy Advertiser"--as far as I know, it hasn't even continued FAI's numbering. For many years, Fantasy Advertiser was a solid, professional fanzine, and Colin's issues were excellent, and getting better all the time; if the time for a final obituary for the zine has now come, we can say it will be missed. It lasted from an earlier age of fandom, growing, maturing, and gathering a wide audience over the years--while for a time it suffered from chronic lateness, quite a drawback for an adzine, its last editor had brought it to a new peak, one which now, sadly, will not be bettered. And now the rumours fly about even CMNI, as Richard Burton's first allegiance shifts from Comic Media News International to Marvel Comics International Limited, taking control, under Dez Skinn's guiding hand, of the weekly Marvel UK titles; what will happen I don't know, but what I can say is that Bem marches on. Only three comics fanzines that I know of have published more issues than Bem, and only CMNI has been published regularly for as long; it makes my work here rather daunting, but I certainly intend to keep going. I don't intend to hit you on the button with a higher price, unless print costs rise considerably; I just want to help keep fandom communicating. And you can help--if you know somebody interested in comics who doesn't get Bem, why not lend them a copy? The more copies of Bem that get sold, the more pages, the more colour, the more of just about everything we can put into it.

Material on hand for future Bems includes the article by Chris Ash I mentioned last time, and a history of the Power Comics group by Lewis Stringer; I hope Martin Dutton will be able to find time to continue Pencer Trak by then, too, and that K. Williams will be fit enough to send in a new instalment of Sigh. But the only way to find out what's in Bem-23 is to make sure you get a copy in March! -ML

Comic News

Marvel have cancelled six titles--INVADERS ends with ≠42, the July 1979 cover-dated issue, NOVA with ≠25 (May), HOWARD THE DUCK with ≠32 (May), MARVEL TRIPLE ACTION with ≠46 (February), MARVEL SUPER ACTION with ≠12 (February), and MARVEL'S GREATEST COMICS with ≠82 (March); the last three of these have been reprinting Avengers, Captain America and Fantastic Four stories; the only superhero reprint titles remaining now are MARVEL TALES and MARVEL SUPER-HEROES, featuring Spider-Man and Hulk, Marvel's "TV sensations". Rumour has it that Howard the Duck will move over to a new black & white magazine once his colour comic finishes.

The fantasy issues of MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL to feature WEIRDWORLD seem to be doubtful at the moment -- a pity, as Mike Ploog was doing full-colour paintings, not just tinting his black & white drawings. If they do appear, they're likely to be called "Warriors of the Shadow Realm".

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA debuts as a standard 35c comic from a March cover-date on; take a good look at ≠1's cover repro, as the title's only being distributed in this country from ≠2 on, replacing the cancelled (with ≠19, March) HUMAN FLY. The first three issues reprint the story from the Super Special by Roger McKenzie & Ernie Colon, with some changes--after that Roger will be joined by a new art team.

The cancellation of the April MARVEL TRIPLE ACTION leaves a gap on the imports schedule--any currently non-distributed title, such as GHOST RIDER, could replace it in this country.

SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP will appear once a year to let Marvel keep a copyright claim on "Super-villain"; Marvel and DC share the copyright on the term "superhero", by the way!

Roy Thomas is planning a quarterly sixty cent comic, to be devoted to the exploits of, wait for it, KING CONAN.

The industrial dispute at I.P.C. which caused the suspension of some weekly comics, and gave blank pages in some others, was resolved at a meeting on 30th November, and full production is being resumed as quickly as possible.

2000 A.D. returns with prog 93 out just before Christmas, cover-dated 30th December, after a 4-week hiatus. Progs 94 and 95 feature a Judge Dredd 2-parter drawn by Brian Bolland and Gary Leach, while 95 also has a pin-up of the good judge on the back cover. A series of 6 cut-away drawings entitled "Holiday to Mars" begins on the back cover of prog 96, by the man who drew the recent cut-away of Dredd's bike. The first one shows the car the family take to the airport; the second depicts the airliner that flies them to Cape Canaveral; and so on!

Strontium Dog ends his run in prog 94, but is returning in ≠104; taking his slot from 95 to 99 is "Angel". It's set in 1983; the hero is flying a computer-controlled F-20 fighter, but due to a malfunction the plane crashes, and the flight computer is burnt onto his skin. The computer's expertise in flight control makes him an expert sky-diver, as it thinks that he's a plane...the adventures "take off" from there.

The schedule for Marvel's annuals for the coming year has been worked out. Roughly in the order they are to appear (though, as 978 showed, things can change at the last moment) they are:

SPIDER-MAN, written by Wolfman.

HULK, by Roger Stern & Sal Buscema; ol' greenskin meets Sasquatch, the Canadian superhero previously seen in X-MEN

JOHN CARTER, by Chris Claremont, Carmine Infantino & Rudy Nebres--it involves the first manned expedition to Mars, long after the time John Carter was active--or is it?

X-MEN, by Chris Claremont, Dave Cockrum, & Terry Austin!

CONAN, written by Roy Thomas.

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN

FANTASTIC FOUR, drawn by Perez.

AVENGERS, by Bill Mantlo, Don Newton & Joe Rubinstein.

THOR.

MARVEL TEAM-UP, postponed from 1978 --it was announced a year ago as co-starring the Defenders, by Claremont & Byrne.

TARZAN.

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, with as Benjy's guest Black Bolt of the Inhumans.

Ed Hannigan, scripter of the BLACK PANTHER comic, promises to explain what happened between Don McGregor's last JUNGLE ACTION (≠24) and Jack Kirby's first BLACK PANTHER (≠1), re-introducing Wind Eagle -- it will all make sense, Ed alleges!

After WHAT IF ≠13 (which <u>was</u> Conan in the present), ≠14 should be "What If World War Two Were Fought In Space" by Glut & Trimpe, starring Sgt Fury (and his Howling Commandos) battling the Space Nazis. Wa-hoo!

Other WHAT IF projects: "What If the Kree-Skrull War Was Fought Without Rick Jones", by Tom DeFalco & Sal Buscema; "What If Dr Strange Was A Disciple of Dormammu" by Peter Gillis and Keith Pollard; "What If Gwen Stacy Had Lived" by Tony Isabella & Gil Kane; and "What If Dr Doom Was A Hero" by Don Glut and Fred Kida.

HULK magazine ≠16's main story was pencilled, inked and coloured by Mike Zeck, from a script by Doug Moench.

Due in X-Men are the return of Arcade, the story of Mutant X, the Blob, Colossus fighting alone, and The Hellfire Club...

The SUB-MARINER comic previously announced is still in development.

MACHINE MAN should return in the spring, from Marv Wolfman and, newly returned to Marvel, Steve Ditko. Steve has also drawn an issue of CAPTAIN MARVEL -- there are no plans for him to draw any DR STRANGE or SPIDER-MAN stories, though.

Guests in MS MARVEL soon include Mr Fantastic, The Thing and Iron Man, while villains booked include Sabretooth and the Grand Master.

Mike Fleisher has written a fill-in story for GHOST RIDER. David Michelinie brings back the Absorbing Man in AVENGERS ≠183. POWER MAN ≠56 is drawn by Trev Von Eeden and Frank Springer, and scripted by Jo Duffy.

MAN-THING is returning in a few months, from Mike Fleisher & Jim Mooney.

There will be an issue of STAR-LORD in normal comics size, in black & white, with 64 pages--its release will coincide with a magazine-size, £1.00 or £1.50 STAR-LORD issue.

Marvel's Hanna-Barbera titles are still going --although Marvel wanted to cancel them at once, H-B has a two-year contract which cannot be ended until at least July. Relations between the two companies aren't at their best now, as you might expect; Marvel wanted to scrap the books because Whitman refused to distribute them in plastic bags (three Marvel comics for a dollar) as they competed with their own "Gold Key" comics. Part of the Whitman-Marvel agreement that led to them distributing Marvels was that the companies would not compete in each other's genres -- Gold Key dropped most of their adventure titles (DAGAR, DR SPEKTOR, MAGNUS, MIGHTY SAMSON...) when this agreement came in, and then Marvel start up a line of humour titles directly competing with the Disney (etc) comics Whitman publish...

MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL ≠7, featuring the Dave Kraft, George Perez & Jim Mooney adaptation of the "Sergeant Pepper" movie, with a cover by Tom Palmer, was cancelled, and never appeared. It leaves a gap in the numbering of the series. ≠8 is the "Battlestar: Galactica" adaptation, in the tabloid format with a Rick Bryant cover--it seems there is a full colour magazine edition of the story too, with the original cover painting by Bob Larkin and hand-colouring inside, but it is only available in limited quantities.

The Rolling Stones Super Special, written by Stephen Grant from a plot by Jim Shooter, and drawn by Gene Colan, is now under way. There will also be a MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL featuring stories of all 3 current Marvel TV stars -- Spider-Man, The Hulk and Dr Strange.

Flesh Book II ends in prog 99; it will be quite a while before a third book is embarked upon. An 'incredible' Ro-Busters story by Pat Mills and Dave Gibbons called "Terre-Mek" is in progs 98 to 101...you are advised not to miss it!

And of course you ought to make sure of prog 100 right away; it starts a giant 4-week poster of Judge Dredd (who else?) by Mike McMahon, and sees the return of Dan Dare, drawn by Dave Gibbons, and Robo-Hunter.

Mike Dorey is drawing a 5-parter strip for Ro-Busters concerning Ro-Jaws' memoirs, and by all accounts it's a pretty nice job; the Ro-Busters strip is now number two in popularity with 2000 A.D.'s readers, by the way, and is closing on Judge Dredd himself. And although they aren't in every issue, the Future-Shocks are continuing--look for such names as Gary Leach, Brett Ewins, Ron Tiner, and Mike White in the credit boxes.

And of course 2000 A.D. will soon have a new companion comic--not SF, but hero-adventure, it is now entitled TORNADO, and should appear fairly early in February. The editor is Kelvin Gosnell, and Nick Landau, his trusted sub-editor, isn't saying much at the moment about the contents of this new weekly, as at the time of going to press nothing is finally approved and set.

Meanwhile, D.C. Thomson have cancelled BULLET after issue 147, dated 2nd December -- in a move paralleling ACTION's merger into BATTLE, it joins WARLORD with the issue dated December 9th. The new D.C. Thomson SF weekly comic is expected to appear soon; Rob Moran, recently a fan artist, is among its contributors, apparently.

Underkind

ITS NO GOOD, I JUST CAN'T RUN FAST ENOUGH!

VISIT SUNNY SOL SOON.

DR. FATES SNAKE OIL KEEPS SNAKES SUPPLE

THIS IS MORE LIKE IT, STOP!! VILLAIN!

GOING UP!

OFF

HALT! YOU SCOUNDREL!

HURTS, DOESN'T IT

MACHINE GUN NELL

NOW SHOWING ALL OVER A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE IN SOUND AND COLOR...

OH,NO!

I WONDER IF I COULD LEARN TO FLY.

CLICK

POLICE

COPIT

DRAWN BY TERRY MOORE
PASSED BY
CHECKED BY
VERIFIED BY
RECOMMENDED FOR DESTRUCTION
Radd

DC COMICS PRESENTS #9 has as Superman's guest Wonder Woman, by Martin Pasko & Joe Staton; #10 brings in Mr Miracle, scripted by Englehart; and #11 is Black Lightning at last, it seems.

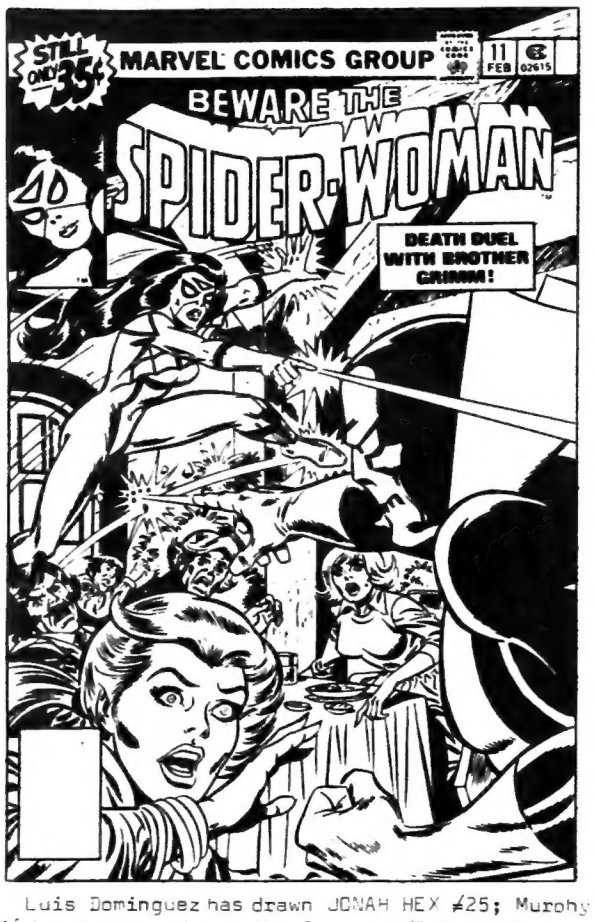
The SUPERMAN MOVIE MAGAZINE (Limited Collectors Edition #62) has 64 pages, 32 in colour, for $2.50 -- it will be released on December 14th to coincide with the unveiling of the film, and is in the tabloid size, though on better paper than normal. DC call it "a comprehensive study of the transition of the comics to film, with the thrust of the magazine on the film SUPERMAN--THE MOVIE." There are literally hundreds of photographs and full-colour reprints of comics panels and pages.

DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE continues as a feature in alternate issues of UNEXPECTED; Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers have done a story featuring Madame Xanadu for this book, and Denny O'Neil & Johnny Craig are also working on one.

ADVENTURE #464 will feature the 25-page Deadman story originally scheduled for SHOWCASE; #462 features the return of Sargon the Sorcerer in the Wonder Woman strip, the JSA mourning for the now dead (Earth-II) Batman, and José Garcia Lopez's first art job on Deadman -- he has also done a cover for GREEN LANTERN.

DETECTIVE COMICS #483, celebrating Batman's fortieth anniversary, will contain "Return to Crime Alley" by Denny O'Neil, Don Newton & Dan Adkins, and the other Batman family regulars.

BATMAN #309 is drawn by John Calnan and Frank McLaughlin; Len Wein, Irv Novick & Dick Giordano take over with #310, though Walt Simonson comes in as guest penciller on #312.



Luis Dominguez has drawn JONAH HEX #25; Murphy Anderson has drawn the Superman/Batman feature for WORLD'S FINEST #256.

Guy Gardner, Hal Jordan's first alternate as Earth's Green Lantern, reappears in GREEN LANTERN soon. GL #114 features a new villain called The Crumbler.

Alex Saviuk takes over the Superboy strip in SUPERMAN FAMILY from Joe Staton with #195.

BRAVE & BOLD #149 (April) has Batman joined by the Teen Titans--to celebrate reaching #150, in May the Caped Crusader is joined by a guest-star who has never appeared in the title before.

Mike Kaluta has drawn covers for HOUSE OF MYSTERY #267 and #268.

The new series for MEN OF WAR, written by Paul Kupperberg and featuring a masterso. of the 1870s, is entitled "Rosa". Paul has now actually left DC, going to Chicago to work with former DC public relations ace Mike Gold.

The SUPERMAN #1 reprint has been delayed to come out on December 14th, like the movie mag, to tie in with the film's release. SUPERMAN--THE MOVIE weighs in at 2½ hours, by the way; it opens to the public on 14th December, after its Royal Charity Premiere on the 13th, and goes straight on general release the following Sunday.

E. Nelson Bridwell could have scripted SUPER FRIENDS every month, instead of alternating with Denny O'Neil as reported in Bem-21; however, it was the only work available to give O'Neil enough work to meet the terms of his contract. I mean, we don't want to let poor Denny starve, do we?

FLASH #277 is drawn by Rich Buckler.

The 1979 British Comic Art Convention's main Guest of Honour will be Jim Steranko. It seems certain that many more American professionals will be attending, and indeed quite a few dealers from across the Atlantic, as it has been fixed for the week-end following the world SF Convention, which this year has come to Britain. This year's comicon will be a THREE-day affair -- the dates for your diary are Friday the 31st of August, Saturday the 1st of September, and Sunday the 2nd. At this point it is Not Entirely Certain where the convention will be held -- for further details, once they are finalised, send a stamped addressed envelope to Colin Campbell (Comic Art Convention), 'Biytoo', Plains Road, Gt Totham, Maldon, Essex. From what I've heard, but been sworn to secrecy about, it will be a superlative week-end. As Colin says, "Every fan in the UK and Europe will kick themselves if they miss the '79 Comic Art Con..."

In the meantime, Sunday 28th January is the date of the next "New Original Comic Mart" hosted by Mike Conroy at The Royal Horticultural Society's Old Hall, Vincent Square, London SW1, just seven minute's walk from Victoria Station.

Moving on to Marvel UK, a lot is going on at the British House of Ideas, but at the moment the plans are still under wraps. It seems that the Hulk will be playing a big part in the forthcoming "Marvel Revolution", and that original material featuring a number of established Marvel superheroes will be produced for the UK market. Such hints as "The Hulk is bursting out into new, action-packed adventures--soon!" -- "New styles, new formats -- Marvel's new wave breaks in '79!" -- "Mighty Marvel is on the move--again!" -- "A new world-threatening menace for Nick Fury--coming soon!" -- "Great new things coming from the house of ideas--in the new year!" -- "Learn the secret of the Black Knight's quest -- soon!" -- "Marvel's new direction -- heading your way soon!" -- "Marvel Britain is Growing Places! Great new stories soon!" and "Beware the mark of ...the Nightraven" are being dropped--and those all come from one comic...

So, expect new monthlies and weeklies, with established stars such as the Hulk along with less well-known heroes like the Black Knight (or "Black Night" as Rampage spelt it), and Nick Fury, and completely new characters such as this "Nightraven" fellow they mention. More next time!

Marsha McGregor, following the hassles she and Don had in flying back to America after Comicon '78, gave birth to a boy safely on September 18th in Brooklyn, New York. Congratulations!

Warren have published a compilation of BLAZING COMBAT stories at £5--look out also for GALACTIC WARS COMICS, reprinting stories by among others Al Williamson and Wally Wood.

ART CREDITS:
Brian Bonhomme: Fantasy Trader page 5; Laurence Bowkett: 14; Dave Byrom: 27 (right); Miles Curtis: 11 (top); Martin Dutton: 24 (top pair); Phil Elliott: 6 (left); Hunt Emerson: 1, 2; Steve Gibson: 22 (right); Dave Hornsby: 13, 27 (top); Paul Jay: FT page 2 (strip); Patrick Marcel: 5 (logo); Black Jimmy Marshall: 24 (middle); Mike Matthews: 8 (right), 11 (middle), 2 ; Angus McKie: 25 (top); Terry Moore: 4, 22 (left); Philip Morton: 17; Nick Neocleous: 6 (right); Peter Noone: 23; Russ Nicholson: 7, 8 (left), 15 (left), 27 (left), FT cover, FT page 3; Luke Painford: 15 (right); Pete Scott: 9, FT page 2 (right); Superswipe: 18, 25 (the lettering); Geoff Whittaker: 3 (logo), 19.

At Gold Key, HAPPY DAYS has now finally been approved by Paramount, and will appear in January --it's being published bi-monthly.

Also bi-monthly is BATTLE OF THE PLANETS, from a syndicated cartoon series, featuring superheroes in a science fiction setting. The first issue will go on sale in April.

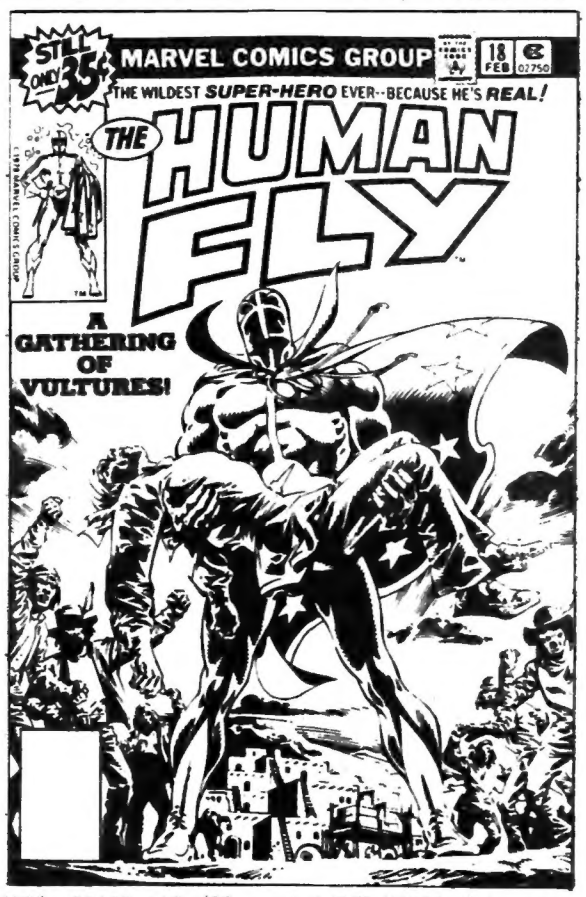
A set of nine "Dynabrite Comics" is being put out by Western Publishing under the Whitman name; they feature high quality paper, brighter colour, and better printing for a 69 cents cover price; the titles are STAR TREK (two books, with "A Bomb in Time" and "The Psychocrystals" in one and "The Evictors" and "The Choice" in the other), DONALD DUCK ("The Golden Helmet"), DAISY AND DONALD ("From Daisy's Diary"), UNCLE SCROOGE ("The Golden Fleecing"), GOOFY ("A Gaggle of Giggles"), BUGS BUNNY, and MICKEY MOUSE (again two books -- "And His Sky Adventure" and "And The Beanstalk").

Charlton are cancelling MONSTER HUNTERS with #18 (Feb), replacing it with I LOVE YOU which resumes with #122; SECRET ROMANCE (#42) replaces SPACE ADVENTURES (#13, March).

DOOMSDAY + 1 is selling very well--as Charlton only have enough material for reprinting to take it up to #12, they will have to decide whether or not to commission new material. Somehow, it wouldn't be the same without John Byrne...

The December-printed Charltons should be SPACE WAR #32, GHOST MANOR #40, HAUNTED #39, FIGHTIN' MARINES #140, SCARY TALES #17, MONSTER HUNTERS #17, BILLY THE KID #126, and WAR #11.

And January brings GHOSTLY TALES #133, SPACE ADVENTURES #12, DOOMSDAY + 1 #10, FIGHTIN' ARMY



#136, SPACE WAR #33, and GHOST MANOR #41, while in February the printing list should be HAUNTED #40, FIGHTIN' MARINES #141, SCARY TALES #18, WAR #12, MONSTER HUNTERS #18, and BILLY THE KID #127.

BILLY THE KID is reprinting Cheyenne Kid tales from the late 50s/early 60s by John Severin.

The Hanna-Barbera live-action "Legends of the Super-Heroes" TV special was compiled for airing this autumn, featuring fifteen DC characters, including Adam West as Batman, Burt Ward as the Boy Wonder, and Frank Gorshin as The Riddler. Green Lantern, Flash, Black Canary, the original Captain Marvel, the Atom, and Hawkman were also in the show, it seems.

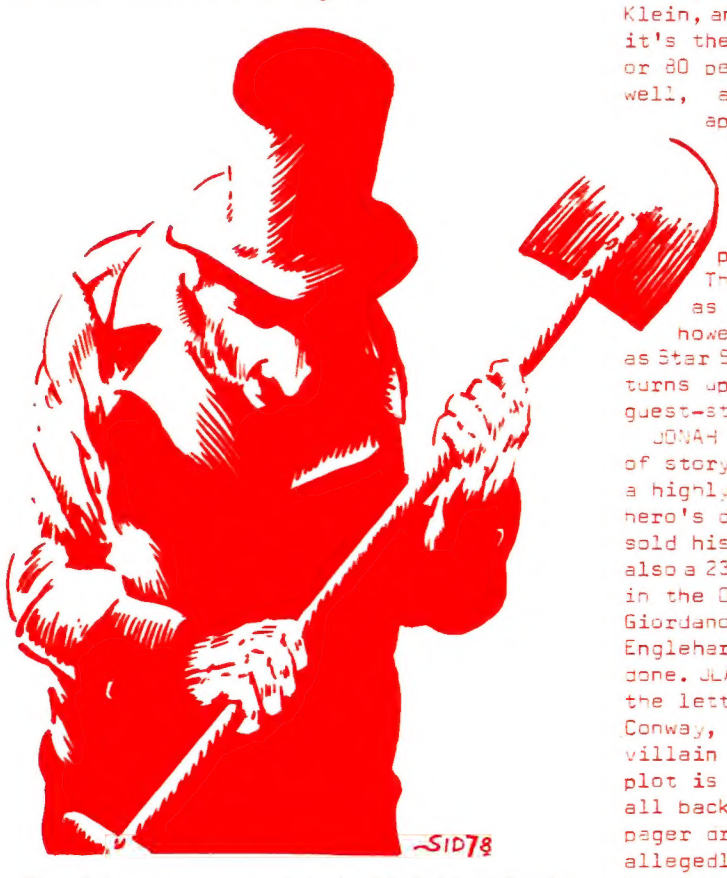
Kitchen Sink's SPIRIT #19 should be out by now --it contains some brand-new Eisner material in "a truly different format".

The WEIRD HEROES series of paperbacks goes on with "I -- Alien" by J. Michael Reaves and Terry Austin, published by Tempo-Star books, procuced by Byron Preiss, and distributed by Ace Books.

At the recent "strips '78" convention held in London, several awards were made. In the comics section, Angus Allen got the Adventure Strip writer for "Bionic Woman" in LOOK-IN and "Hazel" in TARGET; Brian Lewis got the Adventure Strip Artist for "7 Golden Vampires" in HOUSE OF HAMMER; and LOOK-IN was voted the best comic for 1977. The Bellamy Award for the most promising new strip illustrator of 1977 was made to Mike McMahon for his work on "Judge Dredd". In the newspaper section, the best adventure strip writer and artist were Peter (Modesty Blaise) O'Donnell and Tony (Matt Marriott) Weir. -ML

Here, as promised, is Bem's brand new column by its same old editor; actually, it's a last minute decision, replacing what I had thought would be an ad page. However, I reckon that Bem's got enough pages of ads (5, not counting the back cover), and the budget could stand another page of text--also, when I was making up the "art credits" list for page 5 I found that two of Bem's best artists weren't along for the ride yet, and that will never do!

So what we have here is basically the return of "Tale-Enders" under a new name--this isn't necessarily what "Worlds of Emlock" will be every time, but the Review Section this Bem seems a little light on real comics reviews; I'd like to dedicate WoE this time to Mike Conroy, who succeeded me as the COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL review columnist, and has now just retired from the post--I wish him a speedy recovery! It's tough in the review biz, folks... But enough of the preamble; let's see what comics I can dig up.



The February cover-dated DC Dollar Comics include UNEXPECTED #189, and ADVENTURE #461; I know which of that pair sells best at marts! And it isn't the first dollar issue of "three chilling mystery comics in 1", as UNEXPECTED is now calling itself -- the other two, each with its own section, are WITCHING HOUR (21 pages) and HOUSE OF SECRETS (20 pages), though I gather DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE will also be in every other issue. Artists of note here are Vicente Alcazar, Jerry Grandenetti, and Steve Ditko. ADVENTURE contains the Justice Society of America, by Levitz & Staton, continuing from ALL STAR 74 with "Only Legends Live Forever", which refers to the Earth-II Batman--though the meat of the story will be in the next issue. Also on hand are 12 pages each of the Flash (Bates/Novick/McLaughlin), Deadman (Wein/Aparo), Aquaman (Kupperberg/Newton/Chiaramonte), and Wonder Woman (Harris/Abel), so it's a pretty varied, but solid, package.

However, it's the March cover-dated Dollar Comics that really go with the February small-sizers; WORLD'S FINEST (#255) continues on its merry way with an above-average Bob Haney script, and nice Garcia Lopez, Adkins and Chiaramonte art, for "Thou Shalt Have No Other Batman Before Me", with Supes and Bats getting involved with a demon cult in a small town; Green Arrow, with some assistance from Black Canary, gets talked into running for mayor in "Nothing But a Man" by Elliot S. Maggin (now where's he been lately?), Trev von Eeden and Vince Colletta; The Creeper meets "Furious Fran and the Dagger Lady" by Steve Ditko; and the Marvel Family, plus guest-stars Bulletman and Bulletgirl, battle "Dreamdancer" by E. Nelson Bridwell, Don Newton & Kurt Schaffenberger. That's not a bad anthology, then--but DETECTIVE COMICS (featuring the Batman Family) #482 does have the edge on it, with a 20-page Batman story by Jim Starlin & Craig Russell, 15 pages of The Demon by Len Wein, Michael Golden and Dick Giordano, Batgirl and Robin stories by Rozakis/Heck/Chiaramonte and Rozakis/Ortiz/Hunt, and 6 wacky pages of Bat-mite by Bob Rozakis, Mike Golden & Bob Smith. The Batman art is more Craig Russell than Jim Starlin, but still interesting, while both Mike Golden's art jobs are really nice. The Bat-mite plot, involving Rozakis, Golden, Bob Smith, Milt Snapinn, Anthony Tollin, Todd Klein, and Al Milgrom, is...weird? All in all it's the sort of magazine that's worth the 70 or 80 pence import price -- which is just as well, as that's the cheapest they normally appear at, since General Books only do the cheaper comics.

DC COMICS PRESENTS #5 has what I thought an intriguing cover (so there KW!), with Green Lantern, defeated, passing over his ring to--Clark Kent? The idea of the mild-mannered reporter as a Green Lantern is quickly put aside, however, as the main menace is revealed as Star Sapphire--and another of GL's old foes turns up at the end, ready for Red Tornado's guest-starring stint next month.

JONAH HEX #21 once again has a full 23 pages of story, by Fleisher & Alcazar; as usual it's a highly enjoyable yarn, involving again our hero's dear ol' dad--you know, the fella who sold his son to the indians. BATMAN #308 is also a 23-page story, "There'll Be A Cold Time in the Old Town Tonight" by Wein, Calnan and Giordano, involving Mr Freeze; it's not Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers, but competently done. JLA #163 has 22 pages, to allow room for the lettercol; "Concert of the Damned" is by Conway, Dillin & McLaughlin, and while the villain is rather ordinary, the Zatanna subplot is quite intriguing enough to bring us all back next month. WEIRD WAR #72 has a 2-pager drawn by Walt Simonson; and FLASH #270, allegedly the start of a whole new look for the Scarlet Speedster from Bates, Novick and McLaughlin, seems fairly ordinary to me, with the possible exception of a 2-page lettercol.

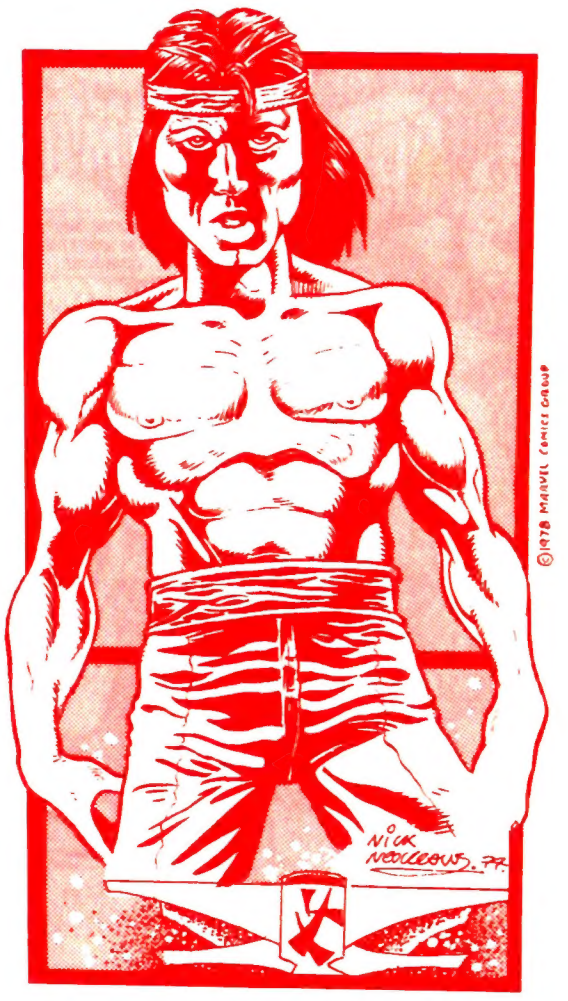
Before moving on to the February still only 35 cent Marvels, a look at the December-dated full-colour HULK magazine #12, with 28 pages of "The Color of Hate" by Moench, Wilson and Chan, and 20 pages of Moon Knight in "Embassy of Fear" by Moench, Pollard, Giacoia & Esposito; this is the last issue before they start painting the colours onto the originals, as with "Jaws 2", but it's in no way a fill-in, with Hulk getting away from the TV-format of the last two tales and the Moon Knight story getting even better. It may cost about a pound but it's not bad value with Moench in this sort of form, methinks.

And one 60 cent title: MARVEL TALES #100, which, besides reprinting SPIDER-MAN #123, 9 pages of "The Secrets of Spider-Man" from the first Spider-Man Annual, and a Kane/Rubinstein pin-up page has a new 6-page story by Scott Edelman, Mike Nasser & Terry Austin, "Killers of a Purple Rage"--and it's pretty good. The art is Nasser in his Adams mood; but 6 pages of new material for 60 cents (40 pence or so) makes it rather expensive.

Starting with the best, X-MEN #118, by Chris & John plus guest inker Ric Villamonte is as usual perfect--but you hardly need me to tell you that, do you? Mystery: action; a quiet moment in a Japanese garden; Sunfire; and the return of the Mandroids, firmly put in their place by our uncanny friends. Nice, y'know?

TOMB OF DRACULA #68 (four more to go?), by Marv, Gene & Tom is a different type of comic of course, but also very well done; "Return To...Transylvania", accomplished in an instant by Janus, is grimmer than usual, with Dracula harried, hounded and even humiliated by his foes. He will never be the same again...

GODZILLA #19, entitled "With Dugan on the Docks", is as usual quite entertaining, with our five foot tall monster emerging as champ of the waterfront, courtesy of Doug Moench, Herb Trimpe, & Dan Green, who are also the men responsible for SHOGUN WARRIORS #1. You give Doug an absolute turkey of an idea, and somehow he makes something out of it; if you like



Red Ronan, then here are three more massive, giant robot fighters with people in the head!

And with that illo just overhead, I couldn't ignore MASTER OF KUNG FU #73, by Moench, Zeck & Patterson, could I. "Prisoners of the Crown" is the title, with Shang and Leiko 'chuting down onto a strangely refurbished Mordillo's Island in search of Shockwave and his captive, Black Jack Tarr. It's nice to see this series back on track, both in story and art.

FANTASTIC FOUR #203, by Wolfman, Pollard & Sinnott, is a third one-parter, to make sure we're recovered from the Dr Doom saga that ended in #200--next month, a new multi-parter begins, but for now Marv's showing that it is still possible to fit quite a lot into 16 (yes --bonus time!) pages. MICRONAUTS #2 has very nice Golden/Rubinstein art, and a script by Mantlo that, while reminiscent of Land of the Giants, Star Wars and the Fourth World saga, is still developing points of interest.

MARVEL TEAM-UP #78 is a typical slug-fest fill-in by Kunkel, Perlin & Giacoia--a pity, as the guest-star is Wonder Man; and MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #48 guest-stars Jack of Hearts and his creator, Bill Mantlo in a good story. And so the last of my space vanishes! -MARTIN LOCK

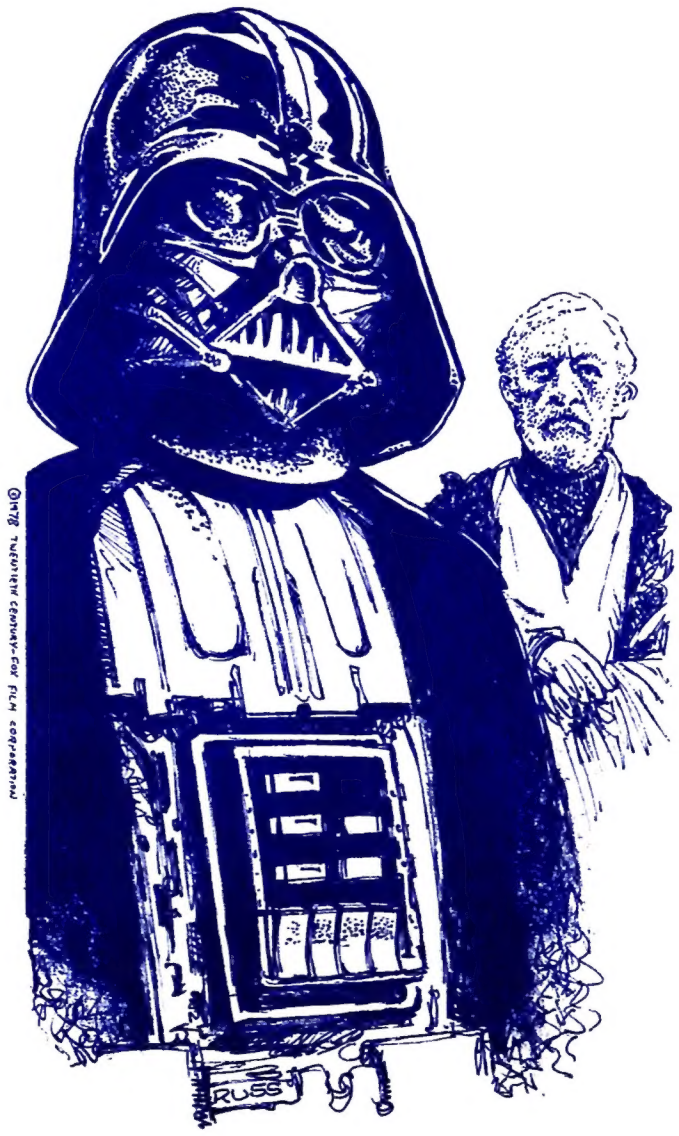
STAR WARS a retro-spective

by MARK WORDWRITER

This isn't going to be a technical information treatise, detailing how many millions the film cost, or how many R2D2 robots were really made--nor is it a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the actors and director and special effects men. Rather, it's a surface-cerebral reaction to the film itself; the story, the characters, the achievements. Basically, I saw the film last night, I loved it; here's why. Similar to its spiritual forefather, 2001, Star Wars reverses the usual rôle of actors and props. The props, which include the special effects and, arguably, the robots, are what take your breath away and arouse most excitement and involvement. However, director George Lucas avoided Kubrick's mistake on 2001; Lucas's characters were "real" people, and there was very much a plot to follow; you could even understand it. From the very beginning, when a rocket ship flashes onto the screen being hotly pursued by an enormous battle cruiser, which sounds and looks as though it only just missed knocking your head off, your senses are caught. Your eyes and ears tell you that you are actually witnessing an outer space pursuit and attack. When spaceship and spacecruisers are built, you know, accept completely, that that's what they'll look like. After first assaulting and gaining the acceptance of your senses, Lucas proceeds to launch a similar attack on your imagination. The rebel's rocket ship is big, spaceships have to be, yet it is dwarfed by the size of the Imperial battle-cruiser. A few inward gasps of wonder are inevitable upon full realization of its size. But then there's Death Star. The cruisers become pin-pricks as they fly towards it; they each become another tiny speck of light amongst countless others --the imagination staggers, the mind reels, at a truly awesome concept and sight. How can mere humans hope to compete with that.

The most spectacular special effects coincide, naturally, with the climax of the film. I'm referring, of course, to the outer-space dogfight on the surface of Death Star between the Imperial and Rebellion fighters. Again, comparison is inevitable with the climax of 2001. In both films the viewer is lifted out of his seat, and swept along with the mad, headlong rush along the planet/Death Star surface. Those sequences, however, serve as an example of how in 2001 the special effects were almost an end in themselves, whereas in Star Wars they were utilised, superbly, to increase the progress and excitement of the story. No doubt it's a case of words after the event, but when you go to view or re-view the film, be sure to sit as near to the centre of the cinema as possible, to gain the full effects of the audio-visuals.

Most of what's been written about the film has been centred around the robots, as though they were the main points of fascination and stole the whole film, but strangely they didn't have the same impact on me as they seem to have had on most other viewers. Their novelty and humour are undeniable --and R2D2 was cute to an extreme--but robots with peculiar or endearing human idiosyncrasies is nothing original in SF. In fact, I began to find C3PO's fussiness more annoying than amusing midway through the film, and I was pleased that their rôles were reduced as the film progressed and their novelty wore thin.



I'm unsure whether Chewbacca should be classed as a special effect or a character, but he certainly provides a handy paragraph link between the two. The scenes that included the Wookiee were amongst my favourites of the film, second only to the "sense of wonder" sequences. The mixture of animal, as evidenced by his hatred of confinement and undisguised fear in certain situations, and human, evidenced mainly by his intelligence, was one of the most fascinating and amusing aspects of the film.

To gain any attention at all with such competition, the entirely human characters had to be larger-than-life stereotypes, which they obviously were. Luke, the youth coming to manhood via the completion of his "quest", was suitably pop-eyed and slack-jawed at the beginning, but equally courageous and determined as the film progressed. The Princess was inevitably beautiful, but far from helpless; women's lib must have been successful in that part of the galaxy, at least among the elite; there was a noted lack of females among the fighter-pilots, and an absence of

coloureds. Han Solo was as resourceful, cunning and skilful as we would expect, and seemed to be possessed of an enormous share of good luck or invulnerability, judging by his safe emergence from some of the gun-battles. Darth Vader was as sinister a villain as has ever appeared on the screen, superbly well-supported by voluminous black capes and gowns (stirring unpleasant memories of grammar school masters?) & breathing mask, amplified to a chilling degree during his first scenes. Considering his mental and physical abilities, he seems to have more capacity for villainy than any of his evil cinema predecessors. And he's not dead yet, y'know. The Grand Moff Tarkin was another enjoyable incarnation of Peter Cushing, who is always acceptable as someone intensely evil or good.

The only jarring character was Ben Kenobi, whose roots seem to have been a mixture of the Samurai Knights and Kung Fu mystics. He appeared to have the potential to accomplish practically anything, which is probably why he was so unsatisfyingly and arbitrarily removed half-way through the film. His clash with Darth Vader, instead of being the stirring and climactic battle between the forces of good and evil, was the walk-over that it always looked as though it would be. It was as if once he had provided the necessary support and means for young Luke's ascent to herodom, he was dispensed with. He deserved better, and his becoming one with the universe, or whatever he did, was no real compensation.

The contribution that humour can make to a film should never be under-estimated; too many films have floundered because of the lack of it. It often serves a specific purpose. In "Jaws", one of the most amusing films I've ever seen, the humour offset the suspense. In "Star Wars", it humanised an otherwise totally technological film. Star Wars is played for laughs, undeniably, from the Laurel and Hardy aspects of the two robots (the homage is acknowledged by C3PO's accusing "Another fine mess you've got me into") to the gung-ho heroics of Chewbacca and Han Solo. Even Luke's Tarzan-like escape, complete with a Jane-in-arms, from the Imperial troopers is done suitably tongue-in-cheek.

The story was a simple, straight-forward tale of innocent under-dogs versus all-powerful and practically all-engulfing forces of corruption. It's almost an updated version of Lord of the Rings, and like that book is open to allegorical implications, if one is thus inclined, which this one isn't. It's a tale of good vs evil of course, but which adventure story isn't. There are no deep insights, or profound moral or philosophical statements, to be found in Star Wars -- "just" sheer enjoyment. I found it sad that the BBC-2 "Arena" anchor-man found it sad that such a slight and "empty" film should become a huge box-office success, as if merely providing excellent entertainment just wasn't good enough any more. Whether it's providing enlightenment or entertainment, the criteria should be how well a film works, how skilfully it is made; and on that score, Star Wars is unbeatable.

After the furore and hysteria it is often most satisfying to sit back and reflect upon how successful a phenomenon really was, and why. For the enthusiast, it's much more interesting to read a review of a film after personally viewing it, in order to appraise the statements made by the critic.

The fantastic success of Star Wars has significant consequences for all SF enthusiasts. First, and most obvious, it is spawning a plethora of imitations, which may be a good or bad thing. From the inevitable swarm of SF follow-ups, hopefully a reasonable percentage will be of a reasonable quality. Certainly, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (which while a follow-up in one sense, was not planned as a direct result of Star Wars' success) promises as much quality, sense of wonder and excitement as Star Wars, though of a different nature. The second effect, that of giving SF some long-deserved status and acceptance, may be negated if too many of the (illegitimate) sons of Star Wars are as awful as rip-offs often are. -MARK WORDWRITER

MISCELLANEOUS TRIVIA -- OR YOU TOO CAN BE THE MOST BORING KNOW-IT-ALL IN TEN EASY LESSONS... ...from DAVID LAMB

When the Bell Syndicate rejected Superman in 1934, they stated "We are in the market only for strips likely to have the most extraordinary appeal, and we do not feel that Superman gets into that category."

Jack Kirby was born on August 28th 1917 at Suffolk Street, New York. His first superhero strip was the Blue Beetle for Fox.

The Golden Age Green Lantern's alter ego was to have been called Alan Ladd, but editor Sheldon Mayer kicked out the idea--whoever heard of a hero with such a name? A matter of months later the Alan Ladd, the film star, was launched on his career.

To qualify for second class postage rates, comics must contain at least 2 pages of text. That's why we have a letters page, and a bullpen page or "Daily Planet"; it's cheaper than text fillers. (Bet you thought they did it for the fans, huh?)

The first "Tom And Jerry" cartoon was produced in 1939, and was titled "Puss Gets The Boot".

Jack Ralph Cole, creator of Plastic Man, was born at new Castle, Pennsylvania on December 14th 1914, and died on August 15th 1958 by his own hand. On one occasion, the Quality "shop", where he worked, received an almost impossible deadline that meant all of them working flat out. The pressure was really on, tempers became frayed. After hours of nerve-racking strain, someone looked up and noticed a white streak zig-zagging crazily around the room; one by one they all stopped work. The zig-zagging continued -- no longer able to contain themselves, they investigated, only to discover that Jack Cole had done it to them again. There, glued to the maddest horsefly they had ever seen, was a narrow strip of toilet

paper about ten inches long with the words "drink pepsi cola" written in Jack Cole's writing. After a silent moment of stunned disbelief they burst into uncontrolled laughter; tempers restored, the job was finished on time.

Jimmy Olsen and (green) kryptonite were added to the Superman mythos by Bob Maxwell, producer of the Superman radio show which had begun in America on February 12th 1940. The Phantom Zone was introduced by Mort Weisinger, and Supergirl, Bizarro, red kryptonite and Brainiac were added by Otto Binder.

Bruce Wayne was 10 when his parents were murdered. The Batman costume was based on a 926 movie called "The Bat" --and the city he operated in was going to be called Civic City originally, then Capital City, then Coast City--finally, Bill Finger flipped through the phone book, and stopped at the entry for Gotham Jewellers.

At one time the Human Torch was so popular he appeared in eight Timely titles--Captain America, All Winners, All Select, Mystic, Sub-Mariner, Young Allies, Daring, and his own title. His imitators included Ajax the Sun Man, Fiery Mask, Fearless Flint, Fire Ball, Fire Eater, Fire Brand, Fire Hair, Fire Fly, Fireman, Pyroman, Wildfire, and Inferno the Flame Breather.

Lou Fine was the first artist who, when it was necessary to draw an open mouth (especially a villain's), would draw a line of saliva running between the upper and lower teeth. -DL

ROBERT CRUMB
A FEATURE

Crumb: "Folks like to read stories and look at funny drawings."
Kurzman: "So you like to pleasure people really?"
Crumb: "Yeah. Tickle their funny bone."

Back in '67, Robert Crumb, a lapsed Catholic and former greetings card illustrator for a firm based in Cleveland, created the "underground" comics scene in America virtually singlehanded.

Previously he'd contributed to HELP on a number of occasions, and at one juncture there was even talk of him taking over as assistant editor. As he told Al Darvoren in PROMETHEAN 5, however, "The Day I got there (New York), the magazine folded." So, after hanging around the Big Apple for about nine months, trying to make it as a commercial illustrator, he went back to the greetings cards field. Then, as a result of his doing some work for YARROWSTALKS, an underground paper published out of Philadelphia, he was asked by editor Brian Zahn to do a whole comic, and was so taken with the idea that he did two -- ZAP ≠0 and ZAP ≠1 -- and submitted ≠0 to Zahn, who then promptly took a walk with the originals.

"I fortunately had a photostat", Crumb related in INSIDE COMICS -- "the only time I ever made a photostat of anything -- and the whole issue was printed from the stat. I never heard from Zahn again. So when I met (Don) Donahue and Charlie Plymell, they printed ZAP ≠1." Together with a few mutual friends, Donahue also helped Crumb to fold and staple the entire print run -- 5,000 copies--and sell it out on the street. "It was a thrill to get a comic book out," Crumb later reminisced; "it was an exciting thing."

That's how the entire u/g movement got started over there in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave, and such outfits as the Rip-Off Press, Last Gasp-Eco Funnies, and the Company and Sons sprang up almost overnight. Aprés Crumb, as Tom Veitch noted, le deluge.

The first couple ZAPs (≠0 and ≠1) were all Crumb, but for later issues such illustrators as Vince Moscoso, Rick Griffin, Gilbert Shelton, Spain, and surrealist fine artist Robert Williams were recruited. Himself, Crumb has appeared in many other multi-artist comics, among them BIJOU, STONED PICTURE PARADE, INSECT FEAR (great title, that), FACTS O'LIFE FUNNIES, and FUNNY ANIMALS; and in such solo ventures as HYTONE, XYZ, UNEEDA, DESPAIR, and BLACK AND WHITE. His creations include Mr Snoid, Lenore Goldberg, Salty Dog Sam, Fritz The Cat (one of his few exercises in anthropomorphism, a process by which a cartoonist or animator insults the natural dignity of a bird or animal by foisting human characteristics on it), and Shuman The Human ("He's so human"). He also has a pronounced penchant for drawing strips featuring himself as protagonist, but surely his most endearing/enduring character is the robot and bearded Mr Natural.

There's an excellent description of the Natch in Les Daniels' 'Comix', upon which I could not improve. In part it reads: "The crusty old philosopher embodies much of the bohemian movement in the United States and abroad. On a few occasions he has proved himself capable of performing something that could pass for a miracle. He does have strange powers then, but they are 'natural', the result of his own personality and experience, and thus impossible to transmit to his followers through the sort of simplistic formula that they demand. The result is that attempts to discover his secret finally drive the wise-man to wise-cracks and sometimes even to slapstick violence."

It's likely that Mr Natural also represents an embodiment of all the phoney baloney holy men and spiritual hucksters Crumb must've encountered during his days in the Haight, back when everybody was all the time dropping acid and seeing God in the most unlikely places. As far as I can make out, by the way, L.S.D. only exaggerates rather than extends or broadens one's perception of external reality, and when Crumb experimented with it, all he could see were egos; "egos that were so naked it was embarrassing." Anyway, it's arguably that his humour, peculiarly American in that it's at once broad and sly, finds its finest expression in the exploits of the old guru.

The strip in which the Natch, his ashraham actually an emporium of Mr Natural amulets and rings, pamphlets, posters and bumper stickers, receives his followers, is a good example. First he listens to a disciple chant the litany of the Mr Naturalists -- "Oh Mr Natural deliver us, for we are as yet unborn and live in our shoes"--then he deigns to meet a neophyte because he's feeling "actinic" (sic)--a good comment on the meaningless neologisms used by cranks and religious nuts in an attempt to dignify their activities. To demonstrate his holiness he makes childish finger gestures, and finally, exploiting his followers' devotion as much as he can, he magnanimously allows them to carry him through the streets in a throne.

In an interview in CLEVELAND MAGAZINE (second take: MELOTOONS ≠2), Crumb spoke of dropping the old fella out of boredom. "As soon as you start taking a character too seriously you gotta drop him," he explained; "otherwise it turns into something like Dagwood or Dick Tracy, where you're stuck in the same groove for forty years."

So far, however, the pair have yet to part.

In Mr Natural's latest comic (≠3, published by Krupp), both he and Crumb have tired of the guru scam of yore: "I don't give advice on spiritual matters and I don't teach no mental powers," he tells Billy Bob, "the most devoted of all (his) fans"; "not that I ever did...it was always a hype; a lotta mumbo jumbo."

Later in the book, however, he experiences a genuine psychic/mystical revelation, discovering the secret of life. But his long-time friend and one-time stooge Flakey Foont is unable to handle Mr Natural's new-found spiritual integrity, and he and Ruth Schwartz immediately have the old geezer committed to an asylum. So it goes.

Crumb's strips are drawn in an old-fashioned sub-Wolverton/Matt Fox style, and though he's a fast worker, they usually convey an impression of detail. At heart he is a satirist, and like all good satirists, he's dead serious, the targets for his self-righteous ire being many and varied. In "Let's Talk Sense About This Here Modern America", a major confession, he rattles off a list of his dislikes. It includes "Fat capitalists, slogan-chanting radicals, fashionable women, fag hags, showbiz personalities and the media in general, urban sophisticates, cowboys, rednecks and other white trash--and their wives and kids, niggers and most black-type coons, pushy Jews, arrogant Italians, snotty Wasps, dumb Polacks--and all other ethnic groups" --Phew! He also has a vast contempt for the youth culture -- the very people who initially latched onto his work and elevated him to cult status--but the greater part of his soleen is usually directed against the women's lib set-up. Many of his stories--stories in which (significantly) he himself often plays a pivotal rôle -- seem to reflect an opposition not only to feminists, but to the whole concept of feminism; and a picture of the perfect sex object in ARTISTIC COMICS, made up of excerpts from his sketchbooks, depicts a large-breasted woman with "big fine legs", over-developed buttocks (a favourite Crumb motif) --and no head!

Still, when Apex co-publisher Susan Goodrick remonstrated with him over his treatment of females, he told her, "I just draw what I see. That doesn't mean I approve of it."

In the same interview he also spoke of his early sexual development, an important consideration in view of the explicit sexual content of much of his oeuvre: "When I was younger I had problems because I was attracted to strong women ... I liked women who were physically strong or independent, what would be called masculine by traditional standards." The most perfect expression of this fascination is probably "Whiteman Meets Bigfoot", in which Whiteman, Crumb's repressed, straight-laced and materialistic exec is abducted by a female sasquatch, a huge subhuman creature, hirsute and powerful, with which he subsequently achieves perfect happiness and fulfilment. The story also neatly sums up Crumb's unhappiness with modern life and his desire for a simpler, less cluttered state of being.

Mr Sketchum's buttock fetish, hinted at previously, has proved a constant source of creative energy, and has given rise to some interesting stuff, notably BIG ASS COMICS, a catalogue of "Weird sex fantasies with the behind in mind", featuring Eggs Ackley among the Vulture Demonesses. "That's my favourite," Crumb told Al Darvoren. (Tangential but interesting fact: in most of Crumb's sex scenes, the male is shown effecting entry from the rear.)

Predictably, some of Crumb's more explicit efforts have occasioned hassles with the Law. ZAP ≠4 and SNATCH were both busted as pornographic, and it was his "Dirty Dog" strip, especially one illustration, as reprinted in NASTY TALES ≠1, to which our own Director of Public Prosecutions took particular exception. In NASTY's defense, George Perry stated that Crumb was actually employing "Rabelaisian satire of a very high order" in the offending pieces; but as far as I'm concerned, the "Orgy-riot" spread is neither Rabelaisian nor Swiftian -- it is dirty.

No question, Crumb's readiness to show sexual activity frankly, warts and all, forms the basis of his success, his prominence as "king of the undergrounds" (though in actual fact, Shelton is now the genre's top seller).

Could it be, I wonder, that this readiness is a carry-over from his Catholic upbringing--a desire to confess all his inner fantasies frankly, without the Catholic sin of omission? Whatever, I think certain writers have read a bit too much significance into his candour. For instance, in his intro to "Breakthrough Fictioneers", Richard Kostelanetz, listing what he feels to be important ventures in "post-realist, post-symbolist" composition, includes Mr Sketchum's comix right alongside "the absurdity-haunted prose of Samuel Beckett," "the ironic pseudo-scholarship of John Barth, Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov," and the collages and cut-ups of William S. Burroughs. Not bad going for a schlep who had to take most of the print run of his first ever magazine --namely FOO -- out and burn it because no-one would buy a copy. ("Me and my brother weren't very well liked," he later recollected. "That had a lot to do with it.")

Variously, Crumb has depicted himself as a lovable hick and a sexual deviant, a sentimental slob and a guilt-ridden neurotic, a fascist creep and a dull-witted fool, a wasted degenerate and a cranky, reclusive misanthrope; and although it would be presumptuous, not to say downright silly of me, to pontificate about what he's "really

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like", it's a safe bet that each of these comic personae intensifies, albeit parodic'ly, an aspect of his real personality, just as a pseudonym often reveals more than a real name.

The fact that as a child he was heavily into Catholicism, a crude but reasonably effective control system which operates by inducing various neuroses in the hapless individual, is undoubtedly an important key to his identity. His narrow upbringing probably led him to regard sex as something unclean and unholy, and he has spoken of his "horrible, painful struggle" to de-condition himself. It was natural therefore that he should latch onto the revolt of the sixties. His psyche, most likely, is still scarred, but to all intents and purposes he has given up religion, claiming that "The truth about Reality is actually something that is beyond our comprehension..." His belief that organized religion can emasculate a man in every respect except the physical is expressed in "The Adventures Of R. Crumb Himself" (originally printed in TALES FROM THE LEATHER NUN), in which a nun tries to chop Crumb's penis off with an axe -- a necessary act before he can become a 'Soldier of Christ'.

Politically/Ideologically he propounds, as he told Ms. Goodrick, "Some kind of practical socialism"; and this idea crops up in "The R. Crumb Success Story" in which Crumb, having made it as the head of a vast comics/movies/records/real estate combine is "liberated" when Red China invades Amerikkka and put into drudgery in the fields of a collective work farm for bourgeoise intellectuals and artists. At first he doesn't like the set-up, but when he discovers that one of his co-workers was formerly the editor of a big-time rock 'n' roll newspaper (best place for those jerks is down on the farm), he has to admit that perhaps it isn't so bad after all.

Predictably, perhaps, the story ends with him being caught out balling the Chinese girl assigned to help him achieve a better understanding of the thoughts of Chairman Mao -- from the rear.

As I've already noted, such images of broadness and vulgarity (that most intrinsic of American traits) are a staple of Crumb's humour. Also, as the foregoing example probably shows, it is alloyed by a kind of knowing self-mockery, and suggests a soured utopianism.

More or less, the discerning reader can probably pick up on all there is to know about Crumb from his oeuvre, for, as Harvey Kurtzman wrote, "He lays it all bare..."

Some of Crumb's finest work of recent years appeared in the late lamented ARCADE. "Crybaby's Blues" and "Big Ass Topics" are quintessential stuff, and "That's Life" (ARCADE #3) is perhaps his best strip ever. A simple story based around his abiding love of vintage 78 rpm records, it depicts Tommy Grady, a hick negro guitarist and blues-singer, leaving his backwoods home in 1931 and going up to Memphis, Tennessee, where he cuts a couple of records which shift almost zero units before getting himself shot dead in a sordid brawl over a woman. Many years later, in present time, a collector rips off a bunch of battered 78s from an old black woman for peanuts, among them one of Tommy's. As it happens, the record is unique -- no other copies have ever come to light--and Tommy is proclaimed a great musician by "the biggest blues collector on the West Coast." The big-shot collector buys the record for a fantastic price, and the story ends with him playing it to a group of fellow scholars and nostalgia-freaks. They all stand around in the last panel, wearing little dreamy half-smiles, as Tommy's beat-up old nigger voice drifts from the speakers, dim, jerky, faraway: "Po-o boy, lo-ong way f'um home... Po-o boy, long way f'um home..."

The tale is told at a restrained and leisurely pace, and the drawings are quite accurate and "realistic" approximations of what the eye does actually see. Elements of Crumb's old "bigfoot" style are used sparingly and integrated into the otherwise naturalistic panels very skilfully.

A very good comic strip by anyone's standards, it is a confirmation of Crumb's greatness.

One of the most important and influential figures in the history of graphic story-telling, Crumb is also an accomplished musician. Like the central characters in "That's Life", he collects old 78s ("I hate all modern popular music... that's right, kids, I'm just a crabby old killjoy") and, according to Susan Goodrick, toy robots, and is left-handed. -PETE SCOTT

MADE IN AMERICA

BY HOWARD P. SIEGEL

THE SILVER AGE OF COMICS

The "Golden Age" of comics is known to most of you. It was that period during the war years from which came the original superheroes. We also have in the lists the "Modern Age", today's products. For the historian completist, this issue I'd like to dwell briefly on the years that began just before the end of the first period, and ended as the present era was weened--"The Silver Age".

Bill Gaines' EC Publications had been condemned almost out of existence. With no military enemy to fight, the costumed adventurer had run his course. Many groups ceased operation, or were in the final phases of their short-lived careers--Nedor, Standard, Quality, Fiction House, Fox, and MLJ, to name a few, had seen their glory days end. Those that remained in business, such as National Comics, Timely, and relative newcomers Harvey, Dell and Gold Key, were hard pressed to know what to print. Experimental rockets were shot over the horizon, but their light dimmed quickly. For example, Simon & Kirby, in their next to last joint effort, once again exploited

the American Flag theme by creating a Cold War hero aptly named Fighting American. Resplendent in his patriotic costume, his seven-issue run between 1954 and 1955 gave the impression that his creators were having one hell of a good time. Adversaries with names like Hotsky Trotsky, Rhode Island Red (a species of chicken), Poison Ivan, Yuscha Liffso Long, movie director Eric Von Junkhead... the parodies go on and on. Fighting American didn't.

At National, the once proud roster of Action, Adventure, Detective, More Fun, Sensation, Star Spangled, All-American and Flash had been reduced to accomodate A Date With Judy, Mutt & Jeff, Mr District Attorney and Binky. Then in late 1950, two titles which would prove to be "sleepers" appeared--unappreciated at first, in today's Star Wars-Close Encounters culture of science fiction charisma, they are looked back upon as being among the best of the non-spectaculars: Strange Adventures and Mystery In Space. Stories from these titles were authored by Gardner Fox, Otto Binder, Edmond Hamilton, Manly Wade Wellman, and Edgar Ray Merrit -- they have appeared time and again as filler material twenty years later. The very titles were used for parts of the recent Hawkman trilogy in Showcase, co-starring Adam Strange; and DC editors still get compliments whenever reprints from these books are used. Both comics were training and experimenting grounds for many of today's better artists. Joe Kubert, Murphy Anderson, Carmine Infantino, & Sid Greene honed their styles within their pages. Captain Comet, more recently the headliner of the Secret Society of Super-Villains, was DC's effort to revive the superhero -- his origin in Strange Adventures #9 is a prize example of the Silver Age, but he too failed to endure. His lead 10-page stories dwindled to 8 after a dozen issues, then to six and the back of the issue. He said goodbye for twenty years with issue 49.

M.E. Comics tried their hand with Bob Powell's Avenger, another Cold War superhero whose forté rested with his gyro-plane and numerous belt-held gadgets. He went 4 issues. An atomic laboratory accident (the favourite setting for so many origins) gave birth to a gent whose nom de plume was Captain Flash. Clapping his hands together activated the atomic fission energy within him, but poor scripting and art led to a quick demise.

And what about Marvel? With Stan Lee doing most of the writing, and an art staff based around Jack Kirby, Paul Reinman (one of the leading hack artists of all time, whose ineptitude lasted well into the sixties for some unknown reason), and a young Steve Ditko (not yet rebellious, or of the crusading spirit that was to alienate him from so many editors). Horror, mystery, swords and sorcery and "space junk" were the leading themes. Strange Tales and Marvel Tales joined Journey Into Mystery and Young Men as the main titles. The latter was to try a revival of Submariner, Human Torch and Captain America--and most panelologists agree that they were better left alone. The 50's "Cap" was a high school teacher who had idolized the original version as a youngster during the war years. With his star pupil, he somehow rediscovered Professor Reinstein's formula, duplicated it, gave himself and his protégé innoculations--and away they went into the Cold War furore, properly costumed and shielded. In 1972 (Cap 153-6) this duo returned, with the plot centred around the decay of the duplicated formula, resulting in mental disorder as they seek to destroy the original "Ol' Winghead"--both are conquered, and permanently retired. As for the Human Torch, with World War II over he is no longer needed, so what better way of dispatching him than having his android body entombed, and buried in the desert? Fortunately, or unfortunately, the spot picked was the Los Alamos Proving Grounds, and the first atomic test blast freed, revived and reheated Torchy. He too, sans Toro, entered the Cold War crusade. Sub-Mariner though received no new origin or revival; stories of Subby as a young prince were published, and, without the surface dwellers, Axis powers, or the Human Torch to fight, not even Bill Everett could do much with the underwater hero.

What, then, was popular in the United States during those years? Western themes, teen age antics, and simon-pure adventure. The men in pith helmets, jodhpurs and boots with blazing pistols had it all over the masked and cloaked figures lurking in the darkness. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that Batman and Superman, special categories of course, maintained their exclusive pace. Neither television nor movies were treasure troves for new ideas; pulp magazines were no more, so that source was not available. Most of the stories were second generation ideas taken from unpublished scripts and tabled projects. Indeed, as Roy Thomas once said during a sidewalk get-together during his editing days in New York for Marvel, "It was a hit-or-miss affair, with most of the professionals being novice shots."

The first three issues of DC's Showcase in 1956 featured fire fighters, animal hunters in the Yukon, and underwater frogmen. Then came issue No.4, and with it the end of a transition era and the beginning of today's period of comic book history. Most comics historians disagree more than they agree; one of the few exceptions is the date and cause of the modern age of comics--the introduction of the "new" Flash in Showcase #4 is it. The DC editors couldn't believe the mail that followed that single issue, so they gave him a second shot four issues later. Again he produced remarkable sales figures. Issues 13 and 14 did likewise, and thus the Scarlet Speedster convinced the industry that the phoenix had risen, and the superhero was alive and well. The rest is evident.

So, there you have it. 1950 to 1956--the Silver years. You won't find many specialist collectors for that era. Today it is harder to find a copy of Phantom Stranger #1 (1st series) or Mystery In Space #1 with its Frazetta cover than it is to get Fantastic Four #1 or Daredevil #1. Silver Age material was discarded or destroyed in great numbers because, in most cases, the product was not appreciated at the time. Today, while not commanding the prices of early sixties Marvels or late fifties DCs, their historical worth is equal, or even greater. -HOWARD P. SIEGEL

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REACTION

Les Chester Many thanks for Bem-21. Nice to see 7 pages of Reaction, easily the best letterzol in fandom.

With reference to Sunail Akhtar's comments on the current happenings at DC, I am amused by the way so many people have drawn the wrong conclusions about these moves, and I'm depressed by the way that Warner just took unilateral action over Jenette Kahn's head, but I'm certainly not speechless. I accept that Warner have the power to do what they did, and I don't dispute that the DC line needed trimming (so does Marvel), but it's annoying that they acted in such a fashion when forall they knew the 50 cent line could have been massive sellers. If Cadence don't do a Warner on him, presumably big-mouth Lee will hang on at 35 cents for a while yet and we'll all have to put up with groaning from tedious little Marvelites until we're all sick to death of it.

Changing the subject slightly (!), I must take issue with Alan Wright's ridiculous comments on sex and sexism. First of all, homosexuals are biologically flawed human beings, and as such deserve our sympathy, but they are <u>not</u> normal and should not be treated as such. And I do wish people would stop using the word 'gay' in that context -- gay means cheer not queer. Springing to the defense of Maureen James, I'm sure that Mo only meant that lesbians can't fertilize each other--and Mo's piece on Red Sonja <u>was</u> meant to be humorous. As far as "lunatic libbers" are concerned, Maureen was probably referring to those daft women who insist that they're the equal of men in every way. Women are certainly entitled to equal rights, equal pay and equal opportunities, but it must be recognised that they are not the same as men (thank God). For one thing they are weaker than men, and have different instincts and desires. The laws of nature dictate that we should live in a patriarchal society, and hopefully we will continue to live as nature intends despite the efforts of socialist weirdos, trendies and so-called progressives. I find it hilarious that Alan Wright in his defense of the non-word Ms should draw attention to the importance of language whilst in the very same letter misusing the word gay.

Ben M. Crozier I like the way I get a good read out of Bem. I like the way I invariably head straight for the post office, next day, to get in on the fanzines etc reviewed. One point...review Warren's comics.

Now I'm going to have a go at Alan Wright's letter in Bem-21. First I take issue with anyone using obviously inappropriate quotes from current hip publications, and taking too seriously a light-hearted LoC writer's comments. Maureen James is patently not a "lunatic libber". I am sure she is in no more danger of commital to asylum than I.

Further, Spare Rib #71 and the "7 Demands of Women's Lib"... The vast majority of Moslems omit to observe <u>all</u> of their dictates, the vast majority of Christians do not adhere strictly to the 10 Commandments. Why should anyone presume to impose on women the millstone of a disciplinarian mandate as "Either she believes in" the 7 demands or doesn't, either she's feminist or she isn't"? Myopic. Strict adherence does not assure solid right-soundness, nor ensure guaranteed membership to a belief. I mean, I haven't bought (or liked) every issue of HTD; does that mean I'm definitely <u>not</u> a Howard the Duck fan?

I do dislike someone taking obvious pride in such a statement as "blah...blah...appealed to me because I am gay." I couldn't care two wanks if he's gay. I'm <u>butch</u> (GRRR!), I drink excessive ale, smoke, play football, love women (and I'm sure Maureen James will stick to fellers, despite Alan's lesbian friends' unquestioned abilities), spit, swear, scratch me bum without getting excited, and all the other things a real man should be proud of, but I don't write to comic fanzines and tell them about it. /(Course you don't. Never dream of it, would you.)/

Now I don't take issue with Alan Wright's personal way of life; and I hope he sees that last paragraph for the cynical, at least jocular ribaldry it is meant to be. If you want Gay Lib, OK, go and get as much as you can, but be liberated enough to be treated by others for what you are. /(Now that does sound accusing.)/ No. It's the overbearing attitude and inflexible view that bothers me.

Nigel Balloch It took me a whole afternoon to wade through Bem's 22 pages (I don't count the ads), and as usual I enjoyed the whole lot. I liked the cover, it's much better having an art cover rather than cover repros making up a cover.

Thundermole's even more confusing than Captain Frog, I think it might be more suited to the smaller size like Gleitzman (?). Gleitzman and Pencer Trak were pretty weird, though I liked the art on Pencer Trak.

I think Keith Williams may very well be right about a reason for reading comics, we'd all have to enjoy reading them, or why would we bother? It is, however, a pretty simplistic way of looking at it.

Seven pages of tiny-print Reaction, wow! This has got to be my favourite part of Bem, if only because I long to see what dear /(!)/ old /(!!)/ Mr Cruden has to say next. So there have been fanzines, newsletters, marts etc before; so what? /(So it doesn't need a Society to produce them -- merely hard-working egotists.)/ That doesn't mean there can't be more, surely there's nothing wrong with producing new fanzines, especially if the zines etc are likely to be different from existing ones. /(If different means inferior, then, yes, I'd object. There's no excuse for a neo-ed foisting his version of Zephyr onto fandom when there are now British apas in existance. See, they do serve a useful purpose.)/ Mike defeated his own argument against a cheap comics scheme, only those with access to the shops like Light They Are can get cheap imports, and now with Colin Campbell reducing his import price, even after postage his comics should work out cheaper than Bram Stokes' imports--and you don't have to travel out to a shop, either. /(Did you always intend to rely on Colin, or did your own scheme fall through? And, just out of interest, if you can manage to run the club on £1 membership, why were you originally asking for £2.40? What was forfeited?)/

The Society, through Fancon, will hopefully make it easier for neofans to get involved in fandom, when they might normally be put off by the apparent "control" of fandom by a group of ENFs. /(You make it sound almost insidious. Which comes first, the control or being a ENF? As I've often preached, nothing is easier than writing a letter.)/

How are we going to achieve anything in comics? By using the media, petitions, letters and anything else possible. As I said in my letter people <u>don't</u> like to be continually pestered.

Maureen James Bem-21 was a very good issue, a nice 21st birthday issue in fact. And I did like the Russ Nicholson cover, could we have more of this type of cover, please? /(If you mean in black ink on white paper, then the answer is yes, certainly, bien entendu, of course.)/

And now an answer to Alan Wright. My remark "I can think of one thing that women couldn't do without men": I didn't mean to be insulting to lesbians or anyone else--it was meant as a light-hearted remark and nothing more. /(As it was taken, m'dear. All these sensitive minorities make for sombre, serious reading indeed. Anyway, everybody knows you meant eating.)/ Self-oppressive? It depends on your point of view, surely. What is a "lunatic libber"? A member of Women's Lib who will not recognise that there are basic differences between men and women--and I don't just mean physical differences, I mean psychological ones too. And unless men or women can recognise each other's strengths and weaknesses <u>and their own</u> they can't begin to argue rationally. I'm afraid that whether or not I believe in the 7 demands of the women's liberation movement doesn't really come into any articles I write, and neither does the fact whether I'm a feminist or not. Finally, this is not a "cop-out", but I don't really think that Reaction is the place to embark on a debate about Women's Lib, so I will pass on to the rest of Bem & FT. /(I think Reaction is a valid place to discuss Women's Lib, noting all the exaggerated efforts to create a liberated woman in comics, resulting in the somewhat-ridiculous Red Sonja. Women's Lib is a reaction against years of needless oppression. When the hysteria has been eliminated, perhaps the libbers and detractors can all be relatively sensible again. Could anyone make a case for Maureen not being an equal to any male members of fandom? Can anyone else make a case for that question having any point?)/

The Bem Ballot results were interesting; thank you very much, whoever voted for me. It was quite a surprise. The "other hobbies" category was quite...er...yes. /(Aren't you deeply mortified that someone regards girls as a mere pastime? I wonder if he (she?) tries to put them in polythene bags. I wonder if it was me who entered them? (Pardon?))/ /(I've just checked your ballot, Mike, and you were more interested in big dogs... -ML)/

I would also like to say thank you very much to Frank Thorne for his comment on my Red Sonja interview. It's very nice to know that a comics pro will take the time and trouble to comment. I'm both surprised and pleased. /(I thought that was a kind gesture too, and it reinforces other very positive comments about Frank Thorne's extremely pleasant and generous nature.)/

Nice to see that Ed Sallis has had his page extended. Speaking of items being extended, I must admit Christopher Melchert's review of Daredevil #153 came as a surprise by its length -- but I enjoyed it, it was almost an article in its own right. Will Christopher be writing any more reviews for Bem? /(We hope so--yes, Chris? Pleasy-weasy?)/

The Pencer Trak strip I'm going to reserve comment on until I have seen some more episodes, so here I will close.

Theo Clarke Hullo Mike (note the informality)! /(Hi, Theo.)/ I'm sure that you are just dying to hear my views on Bem/FT! /(Seeing as you seem to be quite an intelligent person possessed of sensible viewpoints, I sure am.)/

My special art awards go to Dave Byrom for the lovely illo on page 2 and to Hunt Emerson. Furthermore all the strips were most enjoyable; Katholicity did not really appeal to me much though, because of my ignorance about the DC universe -- despite guidance from my dear mentor Robin A! Webster! /(Get your horsehair shirt out, Theo.)/

I don't normally like reviews, but Christopher Melchert's "Daredevil" piece really impressed me -- can he be prevailed upon to produce further pieces of similarly fluid analysis? I hope so! /(Martin's threatened to send him a complete Bem collection unless he contributes further.)/ Howard P. Siegel, K. Williams, Ruan and Ed Sallis turned out their usual high standard of work, and I was pleasantly surprised to read such an intelligent article on Moon Knight by GB. /(Is that a comment on Moon Knight, or GB, or is it another way of saying "How it do ain't it what you do it's your?)/

Alan Wright's letter was particularly interesting. However, feminism does not necessarily involve acceptance of the "7 Demands", it can be simply a desire to have women respected as equals not only by men but also by other women. By the same standards, I feel that Gay Liberation is the struggle for the acceptance of individual sexualities--the acceptance of a person for what s/he is, be it homosexual, heterosexual or bisexual. Indeed, all struggles for liberation are part of the greater battle for universal respect. How can anyone expect respect or friendship if they do not respect <u>all</u> other beings? /(I expect respect from my "chosen circle", which includes my friends and most work contacts, and I respect them in turn. But expecting me to respect all other beings for the friendship of my contacts is expecting too much, and is naive. Or am I misinterpreting you?)/

Wottameantrick! Misspelling every other word in Rob MacGillivray's letter! Bloody funny, though! I hope that Rob didn't mind. /(Yeah, I thought it was the dirtiest trick you've ever pulled, Martin.)/

I note and approve of GB's mention of our own artists in the comics field: references to our own national treasures -- John Bolton, David Noon and Hunt Emerson, to name the top few--are all too rare. These British artists stand at the top of the field, but are hardly ever praised; just for the record, I think that they are marvelous, and hope that at least some of Bem's readers do too!

An unsolicited drawing for you, Em--I bet you reject it! /(I bet you £5,000,000 we don't.)/

John Lindley I enjoy the "Unamerican Activities" column, mainly because it appreciates the Judge Dredd and Dan Dare strips in 2000 A.D. Now, if only some enterprising gent would try to launch Judge Dredd in his own comic -- just think of it, a one-character title, similar to the US comics. I don't think it's been tried in the UK, outside the Tarzan titles, that is. By the way, why did the Tarzan UK title fail? /(Because Tarzan is a boring character.)/

Did anyone notice the 2000 A.D. Summer Special, with that priceless line in the Dan Dare strip, "Don't worry about the spiders, Ziggy", it was enough to turn a lad insane (sic). Seriously, I thought it was an in-joke worthy of Englehart or (Mike) Friedrich. /(Are writers rated by the number of in-jokes they can crack?)/

The new English horror black & whites, TALES OF TERROR and CASTLE OF HORROR, aren't bad; I hope they do well, perhaps we might see the "Dracula" adaptation by Thomas & Giordano in full. The only thing that bothers me is that they might run out of Marvel material very quickly--if that was so, maybe they could reprint Warren material, if they could get the rights. /(I'd have thought it would've been better to start with one title, in view of the limited amount of material and to test the market. But never could I imagine Warren agreeing to his material being used as a substitute Marvel.)/

Finally, a letter from the Sunday Mirror:

"I tried on a new pair of jeans, but discovered that one leg was shorter than the other. I was told: 'It's just the way the floor slopes.'" -Nigel Edwards, Hull

/(Nige referred to his own legs, of course.)/

Neil Poulton Katholicity is beginning to convince me that Kath can't write a serious article--though with no other humorous articles in the issue this came off OK.

Reaction is rapidly becoming my favourite part of Bem, probably because people will write things in letters they wouldn't write in articles. Like arguments about artists, et cetera. It's really far more inviting to be able to write in to a "free for all" than having to stand up and say something, and to be shot down in flames for it.

That probably accounts for Fan Apathy to some extent; the fear of getting shot up over something. Another reason might be the difficulty in setting thoughts down on paper and making them sound good--and a third is laziness. It's probable that many contributors, on seeing their published work, crucify themselves (not literally) -- I know for a fact I do. But are we apathetic? Is it really the fans' fault if he doesn't get involved in fandom, if he doesn't know it exists? The majority of comic fans in the UK start their life with the Marvel UK reprints, and perhaps reply to an ad in one for a zine. Then they buy that fanzine for a while, and get deeper and deeper in until they reach the UK fanzine core -- CMN, Bem, Pan and the like. So then what? Does he subscribe to CMN, Bem and Pan and join The Society of Comics Enthusiasts--or does he get on someone's sales lists, and buy up back issues of comics like mad? /(A natural progression would be comics buyer to fanzine buyer to fanzine contributor to fanzine publisher to comics contributor, with progression to one stage not necessarily barring participation in those previous. Or, a possible sidetrack after fanzine buyer is to dealer to vast amounts of money.)/

Fan connections in the UK are so, so bad. The only thing fandom could seem to agree to plug all over the place was the Comicon, and it turned out a roaring success because of it.

Frank Thorne Thanks for the 'zines. All very interesting. It seems only right and proper that you win the favourite Bem writer award, your effort and concern for the craft show in the high quality of the magazine.

At this point I've left RED SONJA and MARVEL (although I never was anything but a freelancer for Stan's woolly bunch), and have begun a most exciting project that is comic related but not a comic book.

I hope you will be reading about my new endeavour in the trade journals. So far, it's been even more challenging than SONJA and more fun, if that can be possible.

Stand by, and watch for the new RED SONJA artist: Sal Buscema. He'll do a great job.

John Murphy With the exception of Phil Greenaway's letter, George Perez was rather left out of Bem, and, I'm sorry to say, he was rather embarrassingly left out of the Comicon's "U.S. Scene" discussion. /(No, he wasn't. I recall quite a few questions regarding his involvement with the Avengers and White Tiger. But the panel <u>was</u> somewhat dominated by Don McGregor.)/ This man is greatly underestimated, and cares about Neal Adams? Give me Perez art any day! I enjoyed the con a lot, with the exception of trying to stay awake all night and spending my last penny--including my underground train fare, which I was kindly lent by Phil Elliott, who has yet to get it back!

The Bem Ballot results were pretty interesting, and I was glad to see Phil Elliott get fourth in the "Bem Artists" section, but Dave Hornsby only 15th? Shocking!

Pete Wrench I usually find "Reaction" one of the most stimulating features, so some thoughts on the column in #21. Re the discussion on Wolverine's psyche -- Mike asks "Would Prof Xavier select an insane person for his merry band?" Sanity and insanity are not absolutes, but matters of degree. Going by Wolvie's gleeful trashing of the winged dinosaur in X-MEN #114 he's a lot closer to psychosis than most of us. Of course it's debatable whether this is a handicap or an entrance qualification in his line of work, and it certainly makes him one of the most interesting characters around. /(Your evidence of psychosis is his enjoyment of violence. On that basis, every adventure character, except Ditko's Dove and one or two others, is closer to psychosis than the rest of us. In fact, the moment they put on a costume and decide to embark on a life of adventure, which invariably involves a high degree of violence, they're well on the way to a visit to the trick cyclist--and perhaps so are we for enjoying it so much.)/

Regarding HOWARD THE DUCK #28 (the first non-Gerber issue), which Barry Winetrobe made snide remarks about, as opposed to reviewing the thing, I'd say it has too little in the way of plot and tries too hard for laughs, but I'd still rather read it than a lot of the Marvel line. And since when did Infantino look like Ross Andru drawing with his toes? That guy is one of the greats. /(Which guy? Carm, presumably, in which case I agree, though I think Ross has a lot to offer too, even though he only started offering it when he started working for Stan. Ask and thou shalt receive? A similar thing happened with Nick Cardy and Dick Giordano; just shows what a good editor can accomplish. However, I have reservations about Andru's abilities as an editor, bearing in mind the general failure of the DC artist/editors some years back, with the exception of Dick Giordano.)/

Congratulations on acquiring "Gleitzman". It was always the first thing I turned to in "Sennet" in my undergraduate days (sorry if that sounds pompous, but they only ended last June and I'm missing them!). Occasionally it is too clever for its own good, but it always raises a smirk.

Dave Harwood Mike, you did an excellent job of editing on my last letter, pruning it quite severely yet retaining a concise expression of every point I made. In effect, anyone who didn't know otherwise would be unaware it had been edited. This might simply mean I'm overly verbose, but I noticed the "cuts" included my more abstruse speculations about Marvel's popularity.

In the light of the Bem Ballot, whereby it appears the bulk of your readership is pretty young (well, even 18 is young to me nowadays), I wondered if this sort of editing was deliberate. Y'see I purposely wrote what I considered a simple (in terms of subject matter and language used) letter for Bem-20 and you printed all of it. Then for 21 I included, again deliberately, ideas and words that were somewhat more complex -- and these were among the major omissions in the edited form of the letter. Coincidence? Possibly, but seriously, Martin, it's important to someone like me who writes primarily in the hope of getting printed; are you likely to print stuff that your younger readers wouldn't even understand, let alone enjoy. And yet you printed that other relatively complex letter of mine in FT...

But then, maybe nobody understood that one, either -- I'm not even sure I did. /(The main reason for editing is my awareness of the limited amount of space Martin has available for Reaction, with all Bem's other features competing for that space, and diversity of appeal is the name of the game in Bem. I also edit if points from one letter have already been made in one earlier, and also if points are belaboured, which was probably the reason I edited your last letter. Certainly letters aren't edited because I think the content may be above readers' heads. Bem tries to cater for all manner of fan, and Reaction is one of the sectors where deeper discussion can be found.)/

I don't think I've ever mentioned the art in Bem before, which is perhaps a little odd since I'm (supposedly) an artist myself. The reason, probably is that I haven't been impressed by very much of it (in this sphere, Martin, your quality control is still not all it might be), and if I criticise I feel obliged to explain why, which would take up a lot of space. To date there've always been other subjects I felt were more important, and this time is no exception -- a couple of mentions, though. Original art is always preferable on the cover to cover reproductions (eh?), and though I could quibble with certain aspects of Russ Nicholson's drawing, by and large it was an effective, striking piece.

The Pencer Trak strip I approve of as a counterbalance to the humorous strips you usually run, but I didn't enjoy it. It was too wordy, though perhaps necessarily so as an introductory episode. The art was stylistically powerful, but failed to impress because the content was uninteresting and repetitious; i.e. basically it was just a lot of faces. Maybe it will improve with time. /(Whyever should a fan strip be too wordy. Perhaps that is a valid criticism of a regular comic, whose readership may be irritated or confused by an overabundance of words, but surely fans are sophisticated enough to cope with words and pictures?)/

The only text feature I didn't enjoy was the Review Section, which I always find something of a bore -- though I'm not quite sure why. Chris Melchert's DAREDEVIL review was an intriguing idea; unfortunately I found it to be unreadable. Otherwise, apart from a somewhat chaotic Comics News, no complaints -- I even (?) enjoyed Katholicity, without reservations this time, though I'm consistently amazed at the depth of her interest in, and knowledge of, the personalities of comic-book characters. As you may have noticed, I tend to be more interested in the 'medium as the message' than psychological analyses of individual hero(in)es. I'm aware of characterisation for the duration of whatever comic I'm reading, but soon afterwards it's all forgotten. Do you consider that odd? /(So odd I can't believe it's true. If I asked you for quick character sketches of any major Marvel or DC star of some duration I bet you could give me one, e.g. Thor is haughty, proud, noble, and righteous; Cyclops lacks confidence, is proud, practical and tends to gloominess. Yes?)/

Probably the only hero I'd even notice as behaving out of character, should such a thing happen, would be Superman -- and that's only because I've been reading his adventures for over 17 years (dunnit make you feel old?).

Anyway, Kath's views on Wolverine seem to have been borne out during the Savage Land issues, wherein he cheerfully kills various prehistoric beasties, and even a man (though the latter was off-panel, of course). /(Wasn't that more the exhileration of being given the chance to justifiably use his own natural weapons?)/ It's funny actually, I've never been a great fan of the X-Men, 'cept the Adams issues, but under the present creative team it's become a real gem. I have to wonder how long it can last.

The Bem Ballots were interesting, if utterly confusing. The way things are going Bem should run away with the Best Fanzine category in next year's Eagle Awards -- it won't have any competition! And everyone seemed so optimistic in January about what a good year for fandom 1978 would be. So it goes.

Mike seems to have taken over from George Barnett as the scourge of the rip-off dealers, though he wisely doesn't actually name names. /(Whoops!)/ There is some truth in the argument that any object is worth what you are prepared to pay for it, especially in a collectors' market, where there's no such thing as an objective value for a specific item, but then again it is the dealers who have made today's high prices the norm. I remember back in 1968 paying 10'- for Green Lantern #1 and thinking that was expensive -- maybe it was; any inflation experts out there?

I gave up being a completist several years ago, so I've been able to remain somewhat aloof from the whole area of dealer-fandom. However I can no longer remain so disinterested since in the new year I'll be selling off 2000 or more comics from my own collection. My reasons are wholly financial, so hence I can't afford to dispose of 'valuable' items, such as first issues of X-Men, Avengers, Daredevil etc, at give-away prices. You're an expert in back issues, Mike; how does one decide what a 'fair price' is? /(I decide all my prices by looking at what Mike Conroy and Colin Campbell are charging for their comics. Why them? Because their prices are fair, and they have a comprehensive stock. I'll look forward to receiving your ad for Fantasy Trader.)/

I imagine TV and film adaptations of comics will become quite a regular talking point in fanzines for a while, though with the superhero being a peculiarly American phenomenon, I wonder how many programmes will find their way onto British screens. Do you really believe people are likely to take the "Hulk" series more 'seriously' than Wonder Woman, Mike? Personally, I find it hard to believe that anyone could take either of them seriously. /(From the little I've seen, the Hulk's series focuses on "day-to-day" problems of drug addiction and corruption, while Wonder Woman deals with the mad-criminal-scientist type, and in the world of tv, the former is more realistic than the latter. Also, as has been pointed out, the Hulk is just another Frankenstein/Hyde/werewolf monster, which has a long filmic tradition, whereas Wonder Woman is an unbelievable person in a silly, albeit kinky, costume.)/

The problem is, I think, that so much of the impact of the standard superhero is visual --contained in artwork which at its least stylised is still a dynamically expressionistic version of reality. A real man in tight long-johns just doesn't carry the same impact; in fact, as often as not it just looks silly. Oddly, or perhaps not, in the case of women the situation is reversed with, for instance, Lynda Carter looking much more striking than her comic-book counterpart. I wonder though if this is just a sex thing; maybe Maureen and Kath respond to male comic-heroes-made-flesh in the same way I respond to the female ones. Y'know, I'd love to chat to a lady comic fan--it's something I never come across face to face. I wonder if Maureen goes to the London marts? /(Objectively superheroines are just as silly, but 3D sexiness attracts our attention away from the absurdity of the situation. A man in a tight, flashy costume can't use sexiness as a counterpoint--a woman can. I believe Ms James was at the 2-day Con, and does go to some of the London marts.)/

The other thing is that much of the appeal of the comics themselves is their action-orientation; the civilian identity bit being used as an underplayed counterbalance and a change of pace. In the TV shows this situation is reversed, with the central character in civvies most of the time, and the 'super'

identity appearing only for three minutes or so at the end of each episode, just in time to save the day. This wasn't true with Batman of course, but there the whole thing was played for laughs--quite effectively, though I hated the series at the time.

In effect I'm too conditioned by the comics to offer a disinterested opinion on the TV versions; inevitably I feel that at best they are a dilution of the original. In the case of the Hulk, the producers have, in their attempt to devise a character with a more "sophisticated" appeal than the comic-book version, come up with something that owes more to Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde, or those old Lon Chaney Jr. werewolf films, than to its comics namesake.

Again, American tv drama is invariably so insipid (albeit glossily so) that even a 'serious' approach, by their standards, is no recommendation at all. Also it's so darned morose, as if the writers are afraid of injecting humour for fear of ruining their 'serious' intent. Anyway, the Hulk's already become a stock gag for virtually every comedian around.

I have a feeling that the Superman film could prove my pessimism about adaptations wrong; I certainly hope so--for a change Chris Reeve does look the part. Also I have a sneaking suspicion that superheroes come over much better on the big screen than on telly, the former helping to enhance the larger-than-life aspect.

FORBIDDEN PLANET

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Alan Wright Reading Reaction in Bem-21 reminded me that I'd put aside issue 20's Captain Frog when it came in the post, and that it remained unread.

I think Captain Britain deserves such a lampooning, though in all fairness I don't believe Marvel USA understood the British comic market when they planned the comic. I would guess that they surveyed the UK weekly comic scene and aimed the comic at the folk who buy Beano, Action, or Roy of the Rovers each week--however, the Marvel fan has perhaps come to expect something a little more challenging, and may have felt that CB was something of an insult to the intelligence. Once UK's Marvel fans had expressed their opinion on the comic with hoots of derision, no self-respecting comic fan would be seen dead buying it. (I have a complete CB collection, including the Spider-Man Weekly stories and the 1978 Annual --I'm not proud!)

So Marvel's mistake was in letting Americans with only a cursory knowledge of UK comics do the job for us. Dez Skinn is Marvel UK's new editor, and what he hinted at when he spoke at COMICON '78 suggests that he may get a chance to do the job properly, using British talent this time. An exciting prospect.

However, I digress. My main reason for writing to Bem is to tear a strip off Chris Ash, because my mirth turned to rage on page 5 of Captain Frog as on walks "Captain Frog's loyal aide-de-campe (sic), André". Chris, by including this stereotype homosexual man you have personally insulted me, but far more important, you have encouraged your readers to laugh at gay people, including those who read Bemusing. Let me immediately dispense with the "can't you laugh at yourself--don't be so sensitive" thought you may have just had. Gay people are never shown by the media as ordinary people -- the only image most non-gays have of gays is a distortion of reality. Often we're depicted as figures of fun who perpetually talk in sexual innuendo and act in a grotesque way some people call effeminate, though I've never seen any women who act like Larry Grayson or John Inman! Stereotype women and blacks are now largely absent from the pages of comics, hopefully because writers are aware of the offensiveness of these images rather than because of legislative control. However it seems that gays are a quick way to an easy laugh, and that angers me. I'm angry because an untogether gay guy reading Capt Frog is going to wonder what the hell is going on, because he's attracted to other guys, but he certainly can't be homosexual because he isn't a stereotype pansy. So where does he go from there!

This all makes me think of gays in comics generally. In Rampage Monthly (what a daft title!) #4 the Daily Mail's Martin Jackson observes that while we have female and black superheroes, "so far Marvel has only baulked at one of the great permissive crusades. They haven't got a Gay superhero". Or a gay superheroine, come to that. All thanks to Dr Wertham. The Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America (my, that sounds grand) states: "Illicit sex relations are not to be portrayed and sexual abnormalities are unacceptable". Unacceptable, that is, to the CCA, whose document is riddled with sexual guilt. After all, the idea of "sexual abnormality" is merely an expression of sexual guilt.

Despite this ruling, Marvel still managed to introduce us, in the pages of Moon Knight, to Merkins, the valet, depicted as a prissy dandy with permanently pursed lips. Yet again the reader is expected to recognise this character as homosexual, and have a cheap laugh at our expense.

Otherwise at DC and Marvel it's a conspiracy of silence. Not only do they deny our existence but they extol the "virtues" of heterosexuality at every opportunity, thereby doubly oppressing us. Only once have I seen an attempt at redressing the balance, and that was a short strip in Committed Comix #1 which actually made a political statement--that legal discrimination against gays is unacceptably oppressive. I wonder how many Marvel fans picked up that comic.

Meanwhile, Bemusing is not subject to the CCA's control, and I'd be most grateful if you, the editor, would exercise more careful editorial control. I've noticed a number of anti-gay remarks in fanzines and at conventions, and it's time gays reacted to them. /(God, what do I reply to this. Is it a case of only minorities can vehemently object to jokes at their expense? Do English/Irish/Scottish people really care about their racial stereotypes when they crop up on the box? When the typical pompous English twit makes his appearance in a Marvel comic, are you outraged, merely irritated or simply amused. Are all of Bem's millions of French readers entitled to anger similar to Alan's over the insidious slur against all frogs, or are both simply being, as Alan denies, over sensitive. Is humour to be made illegal in today's more aware society, full of vulnerable minorities?)/

Don Macleod Very pleased to see an illustration on the cover of Bem, instead of the usual ho-hum cover repros. keep it this way.

To Theo Clarke: Barry K. Winetrobe surely was not suggesting that Peake needs a comics adaptation to make his work "come alive"! It's merely stating the obvious to say that it stands by itself as a literary creation. If you think that a novel or short story needs a comics adaptation (a novel such as Dracula) to bring to life its full promise then you grossly overestimate the importance of comics. I agree however, though not for such unconsidered reasons, that Peake's trilogy could not be adapted into the comics medium. Comics have always been more adept at dealing with external rather than internal realities with one or two notable exceptions and yet these exceptions come nowhere near the intensity of Peake's trilogy. There are some things that I shudder to think of ever being in comics form, and Peake's trilogy is one of them.

Alan Matheson is still at the address you've been writing to him at, Pete. I was staying at his flat in Dundee for a week or so, and I can tell you that another (probably the last) issue of Komix Plus will be coming out. I've seen the layouts (and, by the way Pete, your art is perfectly safe and, to my eye, magnificent) and the mag looks like it's going to be a real killer, like a Buzzcocks single f'r instance. That good.

Pencer Trak was most intriguing, the art was superlative but the words not so. Too many of them for what they said, I feel. But...yuo, strange stuff, kid ("cryotic Madness lives."--A doctor of.). Bleepers, honeybunch.

Ian Abrahams So Dick Domar once sold a copy of GL/GA 76 for £17.50 -- so what? If he can get that amount of money for a copy, why shouldn't he. /(Perhaps because it's a rip-off price; perhaps because such prices put comic-collecting out of the reach of too many fans, and thoroughly disenchants the world of fandom by making it a far too mercenary place; perhaps because such prices create a rift between dealers and fans and create much of the bad feeling that's in fandom today; perhaps because it's insane to pay that much for any comic (or stamp, or matchbox), but essentially, no reason at all.)/ What it boils down to is the saying "Pleasure received is never money lost". If somebody out there can afford that money for a book he or she wants, what's wrong with that price? There are dealers who charge too much by today's standards, but by tomorrow's standards might be charging a price which is dirt cheap. I recently got some FT back issues off Mike, and I was very pleased with them too, such a wealth of fascinating reading and superb fan art, and d'you know they only cost me 65p for 1, 3- 2 and £1.30 for 16-27 <u>including</u> postage? Yes it really is me saying this, and to continue: One issue of FT had FF #1 at £12.50, and AVENGERS #1 at £2.00 in the same ad. Perhaps by yesterday's standards that was expensive, I don't know, but today a dealer would have to be either rich or ignorant of selling prices to sell at that price. GL/GA 76 at £17.50 <u>is</u> expensive by today's prices, but a very good investment for the future. One thing that amuses me is to see so many people complaining about rip-off dealers, but not having the guts (or perhaps a lawyer!) to mention names. Only a very few people, such as George Barnett, actually mention names. /(It's not a case of having guts, it's a case of stating the obvious. It doesn't need me to tell you that Brian Jepson, Frank Dobson and Ron Bennett all charge higher prices than the average dealer, and thus are significantly responsible for creating the inflationary price spiral. Looking at it from an investment angle doesn't justify higher-than-average prices either. Perhaps an apt analogy is a shopkeeper who charges high prices, relying on the fact that his customers aren't aware of the other shop in the next street where the prices are much lower --or perhaps not.)/

Pete Scott's comments were of interest. Poor old Jack indeed! Okay, Kirby does come up with interesting concepts, but he kills them himself with his writing. The ONLY thing from Kirby in recent times I've enjoyed is MACHINE MAN #1; the rest is bad, boys, bad. The art he supplies with his story is, to me, ugly. Lots of black patches all over the place, which makes it look patchy; perhaps it would look better in black & white, but I somehow doubt it. I've never found Kirby a really fantastic artist--if you want to see some really interesting and amusing art, see "The Song of Red Sonja" by Barry Smith (of course), where Conan smashes a chair over Big Jax's head. Look at the expression on Conan's face in panel three of that page! Great.

The Bem Ballot results were very interesting, although sometimes contradictory--but what "big five" comic fanzines? CMN's future is uncertain, FA is dead, CU has published <u>two</u> issues in 1978, and I've heard a rumour that Panny might not appear anymore -- any comments, Mr Barnett?

Colin French Wolverine is certainly psychopathic by human standards. He is emotionally immature, as demonstrated by his one-sided relationship with Phoenix and general sullenness; is mentally unstable, in his blood lust and unjustified general viciousness, and definitely morally deficient. I still think he's preferable to weepy Cyclops. /(Does emotional immaturity, something Wolverine does suffer from, equal psychosis? If so, a large proportion of the population is psychotic -- and if you disagree I'll come down to Staines, and RIP YOUR HEAD OFF!)/

The only specific proposals from the Society of Comics Enthusiasts for revolutionising fandom have been done before, and nasty letters don't amount to a hill of beans. Is TSOCE a registered charity? For all the visionary talk so far, their main tangible product so far, The Comic Review, is a right load of old Ballochs.

I enjoyed Sigh this time. However, there are many comics without hope--the fear comics. There aren't many around today, because the world is exciting enough for most people, but the EC line and others thrived back in the good boring old days when you couldn't get emotional arousement by popping out for a quick mugging. Hope's important, though: for instance, Killraven was hope incarnate for the whole of humanity, which made him a kind of ultimate hero figure.

While on symbolism, it was interesting that Selicrup & Vohland looked like archetypical Cuban hitmen, complete with beards and shades, while McGregor looked like he'd just had a blowwave.

Star wars and Blake's Seven in the same paragraph? My eyes are changing colour...

John Dakin I liked the "Adventures of a lecherous space monster" cover, the only weekness of which was that the legs of the astronaut were a shade contorted -- but that's being over-critical. I prefer this kind of cover to the indecisive mixture of cover repros and art that have been used in the past. One improvement, though, would have been to eliminate the white bordering, with the drawing filling the whole of the cover, as used to be the case with the now almost defunct Fantasy Advertiser.

I was a little disappointed that Ruan Lanihorne gave only a brief mention to Look-In's "Bionic Woman". Although in previous Bems Ruan and Phil Greenaway have both said good things about the strip, I don't think that it has been given the kind of in-depth review it deserves. In my opinion it is by far the best action strip being produced by a British artist today, and I don't think that anything currently coming out of the USA can compare with the very impressive detail and power of the artwork, or with the quality of colour, reproduction and paper. I'm still amazed each week when I see that John Bolton has maintained his usual high standard--it seems a pity though that the strip is not showcased in a much better magazine. Look-In is aimed at a very young readership, who must be more interested in the disposable comic strips that make up the rest of the mag -- all the other strips are either badly drawn or lack any kind of flair. One trouble with Bolton's work being in Look-In is that many of the people who would appreciate such quality artwork may never even find out it exists--although on the other hand it's nice that some very young kids are seeing high class artwork.

Not only has John Bolton taken a great deal of time over the backgrounds, the figures, and the facial likenesses, but he also breathes life into his drawings. That is the most striking thing about each two-page spread, they are so lifelike you can visualise movement. Even when Jaime Sommers is just crouching waiting to pounce, you can imagine her muscles flexing, and almost expect the drawings to spring to life. The numerous action scenes are certainly some of the most dynamic I've ever seen.

With Barbara Leigh now appearing regularly on VAMPIRELLA covers, it looked as if Warren were going deeper into the heavy breathing market. However, on browsing through my November EERIE, the one with the superb Mayerik cover (CREEPY that month also has a brilliant cover--I'm glad to see the end of those awful Sanjulian paintings), I noticed that the Warren art department have been appending (and very badly, I might add) brassières to one of Corben's enormously endowed females. Why, I wonder, was it okay for such ruderies to be displayed 13 months ago (in #87), but not for the reprint? I thought, and hooed, that only Marvel UK were capable of that kind of vandalism. /(Warren certainly wouldn't do it for moral or artistic reasons, therefore one can assume his circulation has suffered because of Corben's tits. Perhaps one or more of his distributors dislikes tits, or perhaps the tits have caused some adverse publicity. I wonder how many more times I can work the word "tits" into this reply? Lovely word, isn't it. Tits, tits...)/

On the subject of Warren, their columnist Joe Brancatelli earlier this year criticised the cutesie soft porn appearing in Warren's own magazines. I thought it was really good to see Warren publishing criticisms of itself, something which I doubt will ever happen with DC or Marvel --and Brancatelli's November column tells how Jim Warren and his employees (except for the contents box people) took no offense at being criticised from within their own publication, which I think is a mature attitude. Joe also says, however, that when he criticised Mike Gold, Mike's response was to remove Joe Brancatelli from DC's press release list. I don't think I need say any more. /(The picture one builds up of Jim Warren is of someone who calls the shots as he sees them, but also of someone who is an extremely fair person. Still, I was amazed that Branc was allowed to criticise as he did. I'll imagine he was quite anxious too.)/

D.R. Soulsby I have been collecting comics for over 15 years now, but have only recently discovered news and fanzines. I purchased Bem-21, and found the news, letters and comic reviews to be first rate. However, the thing that I detest, which seems to be characteristic of the British scene, is the pathetic artwork. When one is weaned on Adams, Steranko and Starlin this substandard trash seems more pathetic than ever. /(If the fan artists could draw as well as Adams, Steranko or Starlin, they wouldn't be wasting their time drawing for fanzines. However, you may be looking at a budding artist of that calibre in Bem.)/

Why do the strips attempt to be humorous, and end up being pointless? The strips by Philip Morton and Terry Moore were in this category. The final statement by Thundermole, "I wonder who draws this rubbish" was particularly apt.

Why must the "Lord Snooty" syndrome permeate this otherwise interesting publication. The only serious strip was Pencer Trak, and the artwork was so substandard as to be irrelevant to the dialogue. Leave the crappy cartoons to the Beano and concentrate on the interesting aspects of behind the scenes of comics and reviews, then perhaps I'll buy Bem-22. /(Gosh, well, right, then. Tough luck, all you fans who enjoy the strips. Hard cheddar, all you budding comic artists; you'll have to look elsewhere for the practise and encouragement you need. Sorry and all, but we must secure that sale.)/

Phillip Greenaway The Hulk works as a television series, unlike the old Batman programme, because it is given a more serious approach. Lou Ferrigno is the perfect choice for someone to effectively portray the Hulk, though not necessarily the Marvel version. I often hear my friends at school extol its virtues -- giving plot resumés of the previous night's episode. Surely, this is an encouraging sign? The plots themselves tend to be repetitive, formularised; only the scenarios and supporting characters seem to be changed with each successive episode. Who cares, though? At least no-one is laughing at the presentation of superheroes on television any more. I believe the Hulk to be a pretty good, enjoyable series; just divorce it from its original comic book incarnation and I'm sure that its sceptics will be converted into liking the series as well.

Let's hope that the treatment of Conan, Thongor and Superman in their forthcoming films is similar, otherwise a serious appreciation of superheroes and barbarians will never be established in the eye of the general public. Wonder if Mike agrees with me so far? /(Yeah, so do I. I also wonder if Alan Austin agrees with you so far.)/

Bem? Oh -- even better than ever, Martin. It's becoming something of a cliche with me to say that. Now, if only you'd give it a glossy colour cover it would be perfect. /(I think that's a splendid idea. How are you going to swindle your firm, Martin? Or are you going to rob a bank? Pose nude? Sell a GL/GA 76? Sign a copy of 2000 A.D.?)/ /(I thought a 95p cover price might do the trick, actually, Michael... -ML)/

Ralph Frost Re the ballots: I used to read one British comic a week, STARLORD, and was upset--cried all night--when it was cancelled, and merged with 2000 A.D. The main three stories were all good, although Holocaust was ugghh, and being printed on good paper with lots of colour out it, in this country, in a class of its own. I can't understand why it wasn't successful.

An average of 6.4 comics a week? When does anyone get the spare time. I read now about 6.4 comics a month, mainly because I'm a bit ?!*Øed off with Marvel now. The only comics worth buying are X-MEN and AVENGERS. I thought Jim Shooter would inject a certain 'pizzazz' (pun) into Marvel; perhaps I haven't given him enough time yet? /(I don't think Shooter has anything particularly original to offer; he's just one of the more competent and enjoyable hacks, along with Wein & Wolfman)/ I thought the new MICRONAUTS comic was awful, just another cash-in on STAR WARS -- I'm surprised that's still running.

What are people's views on the £1.50 Marvel colour magazines? I like the paper, and the art is good, but I don't think they'll catch on for all Marvel titles. Perhaps it would be nice to have, instead of the ordinary 60 cent annuals, a "Super Special" issue of the main titles every year.

David C. Wishart Thanks for another nice Bem, with a neato cover, reminding me of the B.E.M. tribute on the front of METAL HURLANT #3. Well, the price goes up, but with the extra reading it's well worth it.

As for the added strip content, well I for one welcome a full page of Thundermole, and Blue Lamp seems O.K., but beware of too much of a good thing. As for Gleitzman, nothing much seemed to happen, but as a deeply personal insight into the ups and downs in the average life of an average person...it was average. If I remember rightly, Pencer Trak was originally thought up with hopes for appearing in 2000 A.D., or at least along those lines? If so, then the overall appearance looks as though it has something missing. The artwork could be better, but if it were for a professional comic, then Sudden Comics wouldn't be handling the art, would they? Perhaps a dash of colour is what I'm missing, but then, today I'm only playing the rôle of critic, and even critics don't know why they like or don't like things sometimes -- despite all evidence to the opposite, Barry Norman.

While cogitating over the fact that there were not enough appearances of good quality 'zines, what with the (extremely, very) erratic appearance of Pan, and the sudden illness of Fantasy Advertiser, I was comparing the actual layout of the two major newszines, yours and Richard's /(Richard who?)/, when it occurred to me that CMN always printed more cover repros than Bem; now it may be a personal fetish, but I always like a good dollop of advance covers to stare at, and I'd appreciate greatly an increase of repros in Bem. Where was Boggo this issue? /(On the toilet)/

It was with disappointment that I read about the impending death of Marvel's TOMB OF DRACULA; since its inception, Marv and Gene have held a consistent high standard of story and art. At least Marvel have had the sense not to appoint a different writer/artist team now that Marv and Gene have finished their run.

Re your review pages, it was nice to see an in-depth review of DD--shame it took up lots of room that could have been used to cover other comics though. Martin, since there's so much material being published, how about a list of comics not reviewed with a star rating (like Conroy's Commentary), so that fans will be able to look out for a good one they might have missed if it wasn't on the review page? /(To which you would no doubt comment "It was nice to see it--shame it took up lots of room that could have been used to cover more comics in depth..." -ML)/

Kathleen Glancy Come on now, Mike. Persons whose grief for a fallen comrade is normal do not hug the emotion the way Captain America did. He carried on to the extent where one began to wonder whether their relationship in life had been entirely healthy--Cap's grief certainly wasn't--he took an almost masochistic attitude, seeming to delight in hurting himself. Why, for instance, keep Bucky's costume hanging in his wardrobe, where it was bound to remind him of the boy every time he changed his clothes? Self-pity, I admit, may have been an inaccurate criticism--at least so far as his conscious mind went. Self-indulgence was more like it, as he did seem to derive a morbid satisfaction from it. /(Yep, Cap was probably subconsciously deliberately punishing himself for his carelessness. Such is the stuff of tragedies; Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet were all pathetic in their own way, but delivered themselves out of their largely self-induced misery to triumph at the end. Similarly, Cap overcame his morbid guilt to become ace superhero of the sixties and seventies until sales, or lack of them, warrant the whole schmaltz being revived. And no doubt many fans will be wondering why the hell we're arguing about an obvious sales construct anyway. Are character developments in comics, even Marvel, dictated by sales or a desire to create authentic people.)/

As for Hawkeye, it must be borne in mind that he too was suffering from the (supposed) death of a loved one. Except that in his case his grief turned outwards. Maybe plotting for the leadership gave him something else to think about--he stopped doing it as soon as he found the Black Widow was alive. And think about it was all he ever did. Had he been a really determined underhanded schemer, he could have easily disposed of Cap at the moment when the Swordsman had pushed Cap, tied up, off a tall building. All Hawkeye had to do then was shoot him through the heart or the eye, instead of cutting his bonds as he did, scream "Oh my God, he moved the wrong way!" and when the other original Avengers arrived for the inquest put on a display of grief and remorse ("When I think of the way I always treated him, and now---"(sob)), affirm his determination to make up for this terrible accident by dedicating himself to all the principles Cap stood for, and given the public mistrust of mutants mentioned by Ian Abrahams -- excuse me a minute. Hey Ian, didn't our boy do well in Avengers 176?--he would have stood a fair chance of getting the leader's job. And the Red Skull would have sent him an Iron Cross, first class. But, of course, he was not a cold-blooded (I have often wondered just what he did to those Russian agents who shot and nearly killed the Black Widow. But whatever he did, it wasn't in cold blood) killer. /(Yes, wasn't Hawkeye pathetic, all talk and no action, forever whining over unrequited love, and taking it out on good ol' Cap, just like a spoilt brat, the little bleeder. Even tried to score with Wanda, didn't he. Still even he grew up, given time.)/

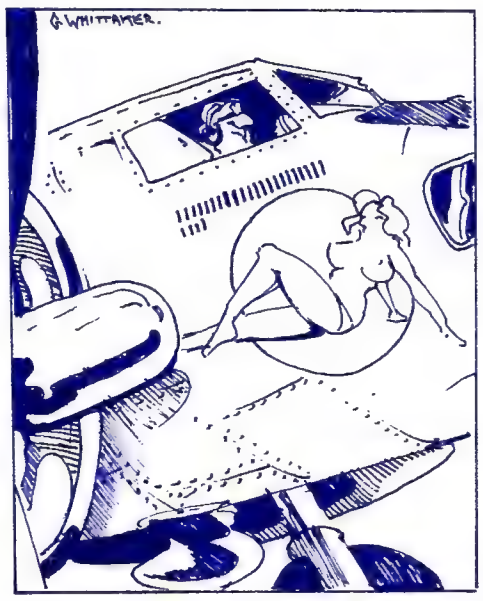
Unlike certain Wolverines whom one could name. Seen X-MEN 116, Mike? In which the Wolverine cold-bloodedly, deliberately, and unnecessarily murdered a man who was simply standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. Can you defend that action? And if you can, maybe you'd like to follow up by defending the man who shot dead a 14-year old newsboy--for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In either case, the only defence is madness. If the man is sane, then he is evil. As for why Xavier accepted Wolverine--well, Xavier is slipping. His powers are fading -- he who once linked all the good people of the world telepathically now can't tell if his closest associates are alive or dead. Also, at the time of the formation of the new team he doubted his own sanity, and so may have doubted his judgement of anyone else's.

The Wolverine has shown other signs of mental instability. He seems to have convinced himself that Jean reciprocated his feelings for her--when she thought he was dead she never gave it a second thought, or even a first thought--because she thought Cyclops was dead too. (Incidentally, separating two lovers by having each believe the other dead is the sort of thing that went out with Victorian melodrama. I fear Xavier's not the only one that's slipping.) Then there's the discrepancy between his attitude to hunting in #109 and his gleefully ripping apart several saurians and one human being in #113-116, and the fact that at the end of #116 he makes a rather pompous remark about Storm's having "gone down that hole to save a life", and seems to have quite forgotten that he himself took a life earlier. Either his mind is unbalanced -- I believe homicidal maniacs, having killed and satisfied their urges for the time being, sometimes become quite calm and normal, sometimes even forgetting they have killed--or he is a most revolting hypocrite.

To conclude, as a madman the Wolverine is an interesting character. If he is to be held up as sane, he should not be shown as being accepted into a group on the side of right. Would you want to work with a murderer? Neither should Storm and Nightcrawler. Will Claremont have the guts to have them react naturally? I doubt it. /(Being practical and relatively poor, I haven't read # 116 yet, so can't argue back. But, isn't Wolverine simply the Clint Eastwood/Jonah Hex/Punisher of the superhero world, with a few interesting quirks thrown in. Like, there's more to him than long fingernails. He has presumably got a wolverine's instincts, especially regarding hunting and killing. And that's a lot different from madness. He does enjoy hunting and killing, but instead of killing for food, he kills his foes.

His "affair" with Jean is an example of his emotional immaturity. It was, purely and simply, a schoolboy crush.

But, can't we agree to differ; I'm sure most of everyone else must be as tired of these three character discussions as I am, and sure you must be too. By the way, hasn't the Vision become a really boring character?)/



Geoff Lamprey This is a vague attempt to prove that a letter can be printed in spite of itself without any interruptions. /(This should be good! -ML)/ If you do interrupt, Mike, why not use something better than "/(", because sometimes the words match so well I still think that I'm reading the original letter. .,.Actually we're thinking of making the separating punctuation marks a mere ".,.", just to make you read this column more carefully--nobody skims through any column of ours.,. The letter pages are an important part of Bem, like any fanzine, because it offers communication between a large bunch of fans and it's a cheap way to express ideas, criticise and inform for a 9p stamp, when you can't afford to run a 'zine or get into an apa.

Do any American fans write to Bem? I'd like to know a bit more about how American fandom looks behind the scenes, as I'm sure that a lot of other fans would be -- it would be interesting, comparing their outlook to ours. Are they more interested in the contents of comics, or the people behind them?

Barry K. Winetrobe A pro-Kirby letter, for a change. Bem-21's lettercol showed one or two signs of support for Jack, and about time too. As fans, we often tend to take instant dislikes to those who are categorised as villains, and Conway and Kirby are merely the two most recent examples of this. Gerry 'deserved' this by his musical chairs act which ousted many fan-idolised staff such as Englehart and Gerber from popular titles, but Jack's case is more complicated. /(Considering that Conway has written and created many fan favourites, and comes close to batting 100% for good, readable stories, doesn't that raise a few credits in his favour?)/

While no doubt part of the treatment was due to his takeover of the Black Panther from the sanctified McGregor, this can't be the whole story. Clearly the failure of all Jack's new Marvel titles didn't help, given the massive Marvel "Jack's Back!!" publicity. No fan likes a let-down, especially an expensive one.

Still perhaps the main reason for Kirby's unpopularity in Britain is the fact that, with several of his titles coming here as 12p books, they have indirectly at least caused some very fanpopular books like FF, Defenders and ToD to become import-only titles, given the very small number of distributed books we get nowadays. /(The stated reasons for most non-imports is that they compete with the British Marvel titles, with the Defenders in Rampage, Hulk and FF in Mighty World of Marvel, etc, or that bi-monthlies confuse the vendor, who apparently cannot comprehend "bi-monthly".)/

So, a word or two in Jack's favour, though his record speaks for itself. Steranko dedicated his 'History of Comics' to him, recognising that there probably wouldn't have been a comicdom as we know it sans Jack; and certainly no Marvel explosion in the sixties. His work in the mid-60's with Lee reached a peak on those classic FF tales introducing the Frightful Four, Inhumans, Surfer, Panther, and Galactus, and the titanic Dr Doom epics. We now know that Jack's contribution to these masterpieces extended beyond mere pencilling to actual creation, or co-creation, of these characters.

Even his commercially unsuccessful "Fourth World" books for DC in the early seventies were artistically exciting, although they brought out that fault of Jack's which is the focal point of current criticism--his terrible scripting. Still it's as an artist with vast creative imagination that Jack shall be remembered and honoured. And rightly so--but we all really knew that already, didn't we? /(Did we? Or do some wonder whether the last will be remembered most, and regretfully realise that the last was a pathetic egomaniac way out of his depth.)/

Simon Booth I fully support the idea of a larger Bem, and though I don't seem to have actually paid for an issue recently, I am more than willing to pay 30p for a thicker zine with reduced type. However (dramatic pause) -- two pages of news, and only seven pages of Reaction? What are you trying to do here? This isn't CMNI you know. Mind you, the introduction, or re-introduction I should say, of Reg Usoatoff's column is a good move. Possibly one of the reasons I'm not so keen on "news" is that it, of necessity, lacks depth and leaves little room for comment. Apart from that, I can never remember any of the numerous changes anyway. Talking of news, I was reading TCJ for the first time the other day; it does impress, with its very knowledgeable coverage and big names in the lettercol -- it reminds me a bit of the now defunct Inside Comics. I suppose CMNI is the nearest we have to this but I tend to prefer the more informal style of Bem...but oh! What's this? Letters from real, live Hunt Emersons and Mike Golds, and Frank Thornes, as well as a missive from a contributor to "Sounds"! Are you selling out to commercialism, Lock?

Meanwhile, back at paranoia corner...did Alan Wright stub his toe or something before writing or did he really take my comments seriously--oh the dangers of taking yourself seriously all the time. Actually, I do really object to "Ms" because, quite simply, it is ugly, it is a word designed by a committee, not people, and as such it lacks any kind of justification. Anyway, I always thought sexism, racialism etc were attitudes inside people's heads, which are not likely to be greatly changed by what they write.

Interesting to see that a couple of other people agree with me about Adams' placing in the Eagle Awards. If voters do feel that the Awards ought to go to somebody who actually did something in 1977, why did Adams win? I wonder if people actually vote for their favourite artist or merely the favourite one who appears on the voting form--that is, if your favourite penciller isn't nominated, would you still vote? I think I'm probably like most people (ha!) in that I do not actually have one artist who I believe is "better" than any other, but I could probably decide, after some thought, who I thought had done the most praiseworthy work of the last year. The only problem of course is that most people, myself included, cannot see all the comics that are published even by the major companies; in fact we are probably lucky to see 20% of it.

I'm not sure about what you said regarding Kirby's versatility. Most, if not all artists tend to draw in the same style whatever the subject matter, and it just so happens that Adams' style doesn't suit horror, Wrightson's does, and Kirby's suits both horror and superhero, possibly because it is so simple and...er...hard-hitting. /(I think it's a case of Kirby's being an old, experienced hand who knows all the tricks. His versatility is apparent in his diversity of characters, use of light and shadow, and foreshortening, all of which he employs to a greater or lesser extent according to the nature of the story. Despite Kirby's enormous mistakes about his own capabilities as a writer/editor, I have the utmost respect for him as an artist.)/

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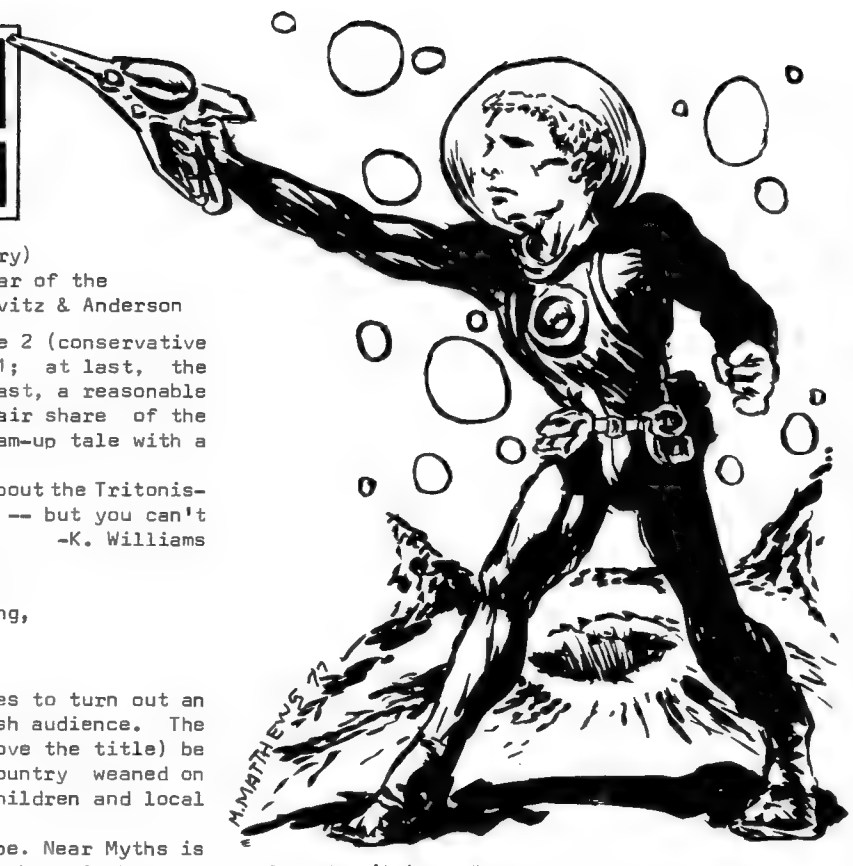


DC COMICS PRESENTS #5 (January)
Superman & Aquaman in "The War of the Undersea Cities" by Wein, Levitz & Anderson

At last, an explanation of the 2 (conservative estimate) Atlantises of Earth-1; at last, the return of Lori Lemaris; at last, a reasonable way of letting Aquaman get a fair share of the action; at last, a Superman team-up tale with a bit of imagination.

Shame they seemed to forget about the Tritonis-Atlanteans' telepathic powers -- but you can't have everything, can you? -K. Williams

NEAR MYTHS #2 (October)
45p; by post 55p from Rob King,

52 A4 pages.

So, once again someone tries to turn out an 'adult' comic for the British audience. The question is, will Near Myths (love the title) be successful as a comic in a country weaned on weekly stories of naughty children and local football clubs?

Well, if it isn't it should be. Near Myths is very interesting indeed, and when it has the talents of fan artists like Bryan Talbot and Bonk contributing, it must have some chance.

Talbot opens up the second issue with chapter two of The Adventures of Luther Arkwright, "Shadows"; unfortunately, Bryan Talbot is not as good a writer as he is an artist, and the story does not flow at all, at least not in any accepted, conventional way. It is different, and does have a very "arty" approach--but it isn't commercial enough to be widely acceptable, in my opinion.

Whereas Talbot's story is very morbid and full of foreboding, John Taylor and Chris Haddon's "Magor the Mage" is very humorous, without being crass or cliché. "Tales From the Edge" by Graham Manley is very messy indeed, with a traditional 'underground' atmosphere to it and with balloons almost filling up the panels--very long-winded. And although Graham Manley's not going to like this much, I must say I didn't think much of his art on "Kramer", written by Michael Wilson; his inks are far too dull to make the story flow, and Wilson's dialogue is such that it does detract from the story.

I had never heard of John Eunson before, but after seeing his work on "The Star Run Saga" I think that I'd like to see it again. The story is perhaps standard fare space opera, but quite entertaining, while Eunson's art shows touches of Adams, Grell, Nasser, and an individuality all his own. Nice.

"Radio Comix" by Bonk is short, and to the point -- Bonk remains one of the classiest comix artists around, along with Hunt Emerson.

"Time Is A Four Letter Word" by Grant Morrison smells of Neal Adams, but is an entertaining story and worth looking at.

As a whole, I would recommend this comic, but I would suggest that Rob King take a closer look at what he accepts for Near Myths. -Jan Garczynski

DETECTIVE COMICS #482 (february/March)
Batman in "Night of the Body Snatcher" by Jim Starlin & Craig Russell; Batgirl in "A Quick Death in China" by Rozakis, Heck & Chiaramonte; the Demon in "The Eternity Book" by Len Wein, Michael Golden & Dick Giordano; "Bat-Mite's New York Adventure" by Rozakis, Golden & Bob Smith; and Robin in "The League of Crime" by Bob Rozakis, Juan Ortiz & David Hunt.

Ignoring the heresy of diluting the magic of Detective Comics by tacking on "Batman Family", and passing over the Starlin/Russell Bat-epic, the Heck hackery on Batgirl and the outstanding Golden/Giordano art on Demon, we arrive at page 49, and the nicest little fun tale produced by DC for years. "Bat-Mite's New York Adventure" could have been of the same standard as Krypto in SUPERMAN FAMILY, but it isn't; it's 6 pages of pure joy. Self-indulgent, maybe, but Rozakis should know the DC office as well as anybody, and Golden draws most of the DC staff very realistically, especially Milgrom. As for Bat-Mite, he is a marvelous cartoon creation by Golden, the best the little alien has ever been, and he could become a new E-Man or Rog 2000 in comedy potential. You'll either love or hate this story, but as everybody buys Detective anyway, you'll be able to judge for yourself. -Barry K. Winetrobe

IMAGINE #2 (Star* Reach Publications, 95p)

In the last few years, Mike Friedrich and Star Reach have steadily become the most prominent showcase for the alternative strip. Thus this title was produced to cater for the more diverse and experimental material, leaving Star * Reach able to feature all SF/fantasy material.

The highlight of this issue must surely be Craig Russell's "The Avatar and the Chimera", an extraordinarily moody little fantasy rendered in full colour, with some of the most exquisite artwork of the year.

Next we have three potential "future shock" shorts, two by Gene Day and one by Mike Gilbert. Gene Day shows a very polished style of both storytelling and drawing that covers up some rather clichéd plots; Mike Gilbert, though he shows an interesting style, also lacks any originality in its plot.

The issue is rounded out by a Lee Marrs/Mike Vosburg tribute, that remains surprisingly fresh and interesting, and a Trina Robbins/Steve Leialoha tale featuring a heroine with similarities to a certain princess in a well-known SF movie...

All in all, despite the poor value for money (44 pages for 95p) and Mike Friedrich's infuriating habit of using the same drawing for both front and back covers, a worthwhile issue.

-Marcus Boon

DC COMICS PRESENTS #6 (February)
Superman & Green Lantern in "The Fantastic Fall of Green Lantern" by Levitz, Swan & Chiaramonte

For a groan-making cover, it wasn't a bad story --not bad at all, in fact. It had continuity and logic to it -- remarkably so for a team-up tale. The actions, and the reasons behind them, tied in very well with current and past stories of GL, Star Sapphire, and Supes... Nicely done. You know, I'm getting to quite like this mag... -KW

CAPTAIN AMERICA #230 (February)
"Assault on Alcatraz" by Roger McKenzie, Roger Stern, Sal Buscema & Don Perlin;
INCREDIBLE HULK #232 (February)
"The Battle Below" by Roger Stern, David Michelinie, Sal Buscema & Mike Esposito

A crossover finale (sort of) to the Corporation multiplot--and very good it is too, in fact the best Marvel crossover since Tomb of Dracula 44/Dr Strange 14. Like that epic, this tale is blessed with the same artist on both halves, and on the two stars for whom he has produced definitive art styles.

This is really a Cap two-parter, and strongly influenced by Englehart's Secret Empire saga in storyline and scripting, evoking the same feelings of involvement here as with Cap 172-175. The large cast here is handled with great skill by the two Rogers and David, although there were perhaps too many plot-twists and shocks even for 34 pages. The Hulk parts of the story were handled really well; HULK is continuing the excellence begun by Wein around #195 and we get a nice, typical teaser for next issue. All in all, a good read and a definitely good buy -- even though it should have been presented in an annual, or some other 60 cent book. -Barry K. Winetrobe

CANNON #1
Published by Wally Wood; £4.00

Wally wood is publishing his own work these days, after a few unfortunate experiences with publishers; his plans call for four issues of CANNON, as well as four featuring SALLY FORTH and her friends, and some other projects.

Sally Forth, as you may be aware, is a young lady who, often in a satirical SF situation, gets very forgetful about where she leaves all her clothes; most of the plot glides by above her pretty, empty head. In this volume (32 10" by 12" pages of story, plus covers), the main character is an emotionless, super-efficient secret agent --who, probably because like Sally this strip was originally aimed at U.S. army newspapers, gets to meet a number of naked ladies, all drawn with great style by Mr Wood. At least Sue Smith and Madame Toy have characters, albeit fairly wicked ones.

Good Wood art, coupled with clichéd plots--but all this female nudity smacks overmuch of "sexploitation". It seems a pity to me that Mr Wood hasn't enough confidence in his audience to get rid of all this bare skin, and try something a bit more original. -Ruan Lanihorne

PLAY BALL, SNOOPY by Charles M. Schulz

Selected cartoons from "Win A Few, Lose A Few, Charlie Brown" this time. This is the latest book featuring the Peanuts characters, and it is definitely just as good as the other 50 in the series from Coronet Books. To tell you what happens in it would be to spoil your enjoyment of this truly great cartoon series--it's safe to say though that if you've the remotest interest in Snoopy and company, you've got to get this. Reading it in book form is far better than just reading 3 panels a time in the Daily Mail; there are some very funny sequences.

Well worth your 60p. -Ian Abrahams

SUPERHEROES
edited by Michel Parry; Sphere, 85p.

A nice thing about being employed by a book publisher is that all sorts of books I might never normally get to see find their way into our office. As the title suggests, this book is a collection of tales of superheroes, six of which are reprinted, six of which are original; and there is an additional non-fiction piece, concerning Superman's sex life, by Larry Niven.

The cover is unmistakable, and very nice; it has a logo pinched from the LSH, and a painting (signed "Melvyn") of a long-haired guy wearing a red and blue hero suit, a Spidey mask, and a Thor-type winged helmet, carrying Captain America's shield.

My major gripe about the book is that two of the tales reprinted from the forties are rather dated now, especially "the Golden Amazon Returns" by John Russell Fearn. Also on the minus side I found Frank Adey's "Alternative Ending", concerning Superbaby's arrival on Earth, although original rather tedious, and Don Glut's "Origin of a Superhero" was, like his comics stories, trying to pad out too little in too much space.

My personal favourite tale is "Satyr-Man" by John A. Keel, a hilarious lampooning of a certain Caped Crusader. Example: Satyr-Man returns to the gent he has rescued from two thugs and asks "Are you hurt badly?" After hearing that some ribs are broken and some teeth missing, he says "Oh, that's unfortunate, but I know a good dentist." That is followed by 12 more pages of lunacy.

"Transmuto, the Metamorphic Myrmidon", from Adrian Cole, is likened to Plastic Man in the introduction, and is indeed written in a similar humorous vein, concerning an undercover dustman with powers like Chameleon Boy; "The Awesome Menace of 'The Polarizer'" is a Spider-Man type tale, featuring a Spider-Man type hero, and, despite blatant copying of ideas from at least five different comics, is very entertaining. The author was George Alec Effinger.

"Up, Up And Away" by Allan C. Kimball is one of only two serious tales (along with "Alternative Ending") in the book, and it deals with the problems of a superman. "Stuporman" is a parody (from 1943) of our man from Krypton, who appears in (or is lampooned in) five of the thirteen items here; the best of the take-offs is by Norman Spinrad, concerning the problems of a psychiatrist besieged by patients who believe themselves to be Clark Kent. A tricky problem--but the psychiatrist is really supershrink, "More powerful than a raving psychotic, able to diagnose whole neuroses in a single session, faster than Freud, and abler than Adler".

Of the thirteen pieces I personally liked ten, and that to my mind is worth the 85p I didn't have to pay for the book. -Frank Plowright

STAR WARS #21 (March)
"Shadow of a Dark Lord" by Archie Goodwin, Carmine Infantino and Gene Day

This comic's not due out yet -- but since it's already been printed in STAR WARS WEEKLY #41 and #42 a full month earlier, I'm able to review it.

The current "Wheel of Death" multi-parter begun in SW18 (or SWW35) is my favourite Star Wars tale so far; if the adaptation in issues 1-6 had been the source of the original film, then a film made from this adventure would be even better! And, with the long-awaited return of Lord Vader, the story is getting even more engrossing...

Not that this issue is the long-awaited confrontation between the two sides of the Force, Kenobi's two pupils Skywalker and Vader--in the first half of the tale they do fight, but only inside Luke's mind, while the second half shows that Lord Vader, though not yet on the gigantic space station known as "the Wheel", is heading that way--as is Valance, the cyborg bounty hunter from issue 16. With all that brewing, Solo and Chewie trapped in the gladiatorial games, and the robot/computer Master-Com acting on its own, Archie's certainly got his act together! -RL

SUPERMAN FAMILY #193 (January/February)

Superboy in "Menace of the Mechanical Master" by deFalco & Staton; Jimmy Olsen in "The Project: Perilous" by deFalco, Schaffenberger & Blaisdell; Lois Lane in "Hospital Hostilities" by deFalco, Mortimer & Smith; Supergirl in "The Gravity War" by Conway, Edelman, Jones & Tanghal; Superman in "My Mother, Supergirl" by Conway, Schaffenberger & Giella; and Nightwing & Flamebird in "Target: Van-Zee" by Kupperberg, Landgraf & Oksner.

An excerpt from SuperJohnboy's diary:-

"...Gee, things ain't going too well for the family these days. Why, only this issue me an' Krypto had to fight the Mechanical Master, and that was one of the most borin' chores I ever did get stuck with. Cousin Jimmy Olsen's hightailed it off with the Newsboy Legion to save the world from a mad scientist an' a race of clones, which sounds like a darned fool thing to me anyhow. Meanwhile Lois Lane's been making a show of herself down at Metropolis General Hospital, in a brawl with more of them pesky clones, an' last I heard of big sis Supergirl she was sortin' out an anti-gravity war in London England with the Doom Patrol. On top of all this, Superman's been wastin' his time livin' out useless fantasies on his Fortress of Solitude Probability Simulator, an' I need hardly bore you with the goings-on in that there city of Kandor. I guess it don't help none when you're all crushed up in an old tumble-down book like this, but we call it home. Yup, we're keeping our sunny side up despite the Great Depression of Talent. Mind you, when the best work in the book comes from Tom deFalco an' Arv Jones, things sure have to be bad...Night all."

-Geoff Lindsey

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: STALKER FROM THE STARS
by Len Wein, Marv Wolfman & Joseph Silva.
Pocket Books, Nov 1978; 176 pages; $1.75

Quite an entertaining read, old greenskin's first novel-length text adventure. Smilin' Stan, in his introduction, burbles that it "goes even a step further than the television show itself" by taking us back to "the original magazine concept", which is Stanspeak for an assurance that it's the comics version who's rampaging through 31 chapters here, not Bill Bixby & Lou Ferrigno --so Rick Jones, General Ross, and even Clay Quartermain are all involved in the story, which involves a nasty alien monster, Sh'mballah, who has taken control of the minds of the villagers of sleepy Crater Falls.

So once again old jade-jaws has to come to the rescue, in, would you believe, a team effort with his friend the General? I quite enjoyed this simple, fast-moving novel -- maybe it's because I'm simple and fast-moving too! -Jonn Hay

REG USPATOFF

Martin, scrap the column I sent you, it's out of date! Try to fit this into Bem 22 instead--you said my page had a later printing date than the news page, this time that's very handy!

Marvel are cutting back their line of comics. Like DC a few months ago, they are scrapping all bi-monthly comics... As I write, the final listing is not definite, but the 20 monthly regular-sized books should be:

AVENGERS	MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE
BATTLE STAR G'TICA	RAWHIDE KID
CAPTAIN AMERICA	SERGEANT FURY
CONAN	SPECT. SPIDER-MAN
FANTASTIC FOUR	SPIDER-MAN
INCREDIBLE HULK	SPIDER-WOMAN
IRON MAN	SPIDEY
MARVEL SUPER-HEROES	STAR WARS
MARVEL TALES	THOR
MARVEL TEAM-UP	X-MEN

These books will continue at 35 cents --to maintain the price advantage over DC, they will now feature 15 pages of art only. SERGEANT FURY will return to new material after five years of reprint stories, from Bill Mantlo & Herb Trimpe; RAWHIDE KID, MARVEL SUPER-HEROES and MARVEL TALES continue to feature reprint material at least for the present, but there is a chance they may be used to publish already-completed material done for books now cancelled.

The black & white magazine line is, except for CRAZY, cancelled, while no more full-colour magazines are scheduled for the present; the reprint Treasuries are continuing, though, as is PIZZAZZ, while the 60 cent 4-colour bi-monthlies, with 30-32 pages of story, are now:

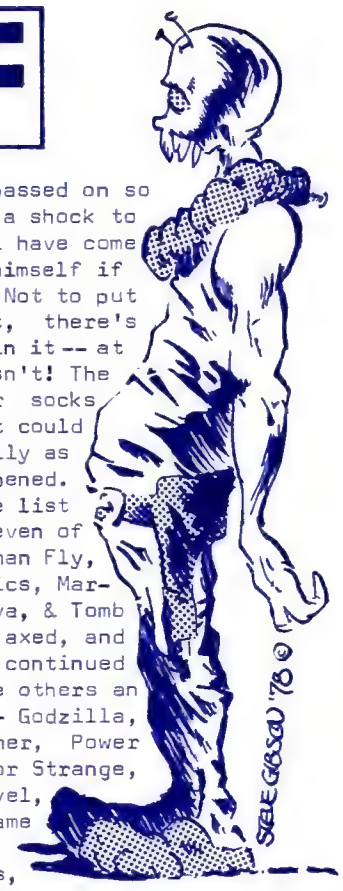
MARVEL PREVIEW
MARVEL SUPER ACTION
RAMPAGING HULK
SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN
THOR THE MIGHTY
WHAT IF

The list of titles cancelled in the shake-up and other recent moves, not counting the Hanna-Barbera comics, is therefore:

BLACK PANTHER	MARVEL PREMIERE
CAPTAIN MARVEL	MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL
DAREDEVIL	MARVEL'S GREATEST
DEFENDERS	MARVEL TRIPLE ACTION
DOCTOR STRANGE	MASTER OF KUNG FU
GHOST RIDER	MICRONAUTS
GODZILLA	MS MARVEL
HOWARD THE DUCK	NOVA
HUMAN FLY	POWER MAN
INVADERS	RED SONJA
JOHN CARTER	SHOGUN WARRIORS
KID COLT OUTLAW	TARZAN
MARVEL CLASSICS	TOMB OF DRACULA

As the range of annuals has also been shelved, this means, excluding Pizzazz, Crazy, and treasuries, and also the soon-to-finish Hanna-Barbera books, a virtual halving of Marvel's output per month. I have no news of redundancies, but would guess that around half of the Marvel editorial team, such as Richard Marschall, Mary Jo Duffy, Jim Shooter, Jim Salicrup, Roger Stern, Al Milgrom, and Ralph Macchio are now surplus to requirements, while the number of books that freelancers can work on is very low, so that several familiar names from the credits boxes may soon vanish. And, inside the comics field, where is there for them to go?

The smaller number of pages in a comic is another step in the gradual decline of the comic-book; how long before DC follow suit? A vague crumb of comfort is the strengthening of the 60 cent line to 3 books a month; perhaps in the long run this retrenchment will be looked back on as a logical move.



Now, the news I've passed on so far may have come as a shock to you--and indeed it will have come as a surprise to Stan himself if he gets to read Bem! Not to put too fine a point on it, there's not a word of truth in it -- at least, I hope there isn't! The point of scaring your socks off was to say that it could happen, just as easily as the DC Implosion happened. In fact, looking at the list of cancelled titles, seven of the 26 books (HTD, Human Fly, Invaders, Marvel Classics, Marvel Triple Action, Nova, & Tomb of Dracula) have been axed, and I wouldn't call the continued appearance of half the others an iron-clad certainty -- Godzilla, Kid Colt, Black Panther, Power Man, Red Sonja, Doctor Strange, Captain Marvel, Ms Marvel, and Ghost Rider, to name but a few.

The colour magazines, for all Marvel's exuberance, don't seem to have grown and prospered; at one stage SAVAGE SWORD was scheduled to convert to the colour format as a regular monthly title, but those plans were scrapped -- only film, TV and rock tie-in titles seem to be published, which shows that Marvel feel an ordinary superhero hasn't enough appeal to sell enough copies of a Super Special -- and if the mainstays of Marvel aren't good enough to sell 56 colour pages for $1.50, it has to put a question mark against the long-run viability of the format. And why, I wonder, is MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #8, "Battlestar Galactica", printed in the treasury size? It's obviously a last-minute change, judging by the flat, sketchy cover which is in fact a hasty re-drawing of the detailed, impressive painting the book would have had in the smaller, richer format; Ernie Colon's art wasn't designed to be printed on 10" by 13¼" paper with only mechanical 35 cent colouring--reduction, and painted colouring, might have made it look much more presentable.

And do you think Marvel would be tempted to add two more pages of ads, increasing ad revenue and decreasing the cost of producing a comic, if it meant they could keep a price advantage over DC? Personally, I'd love to see thicker comics, such as those six bi-monthlies I threw in to match up against the Dollar Comics -- but in any contest between formats, the slimmer, cheaper size has always won. That's one of the drawbacks of aiming your product at a 9-14 age-group.

Since I would hate my friends at DC to feel I was neglecting them, I'd like to end with a look at their activities--After Disaster. Now I do not read every title they issue, as they employ some writers and artists whose current work does not appeal to me, but in the books I have read I've not seen any explanation for the cut-backs in size or number. As one might expect, Paul Levitz was around the first to comment at all -- he did at least mention that the Human Target's strip was moving out of Brave & Bold to Detective as "a result of our return to the 32-page format, which is hopefully explained elsewhere by the higher authorities." It wasn't. Elsewhere, he comments, concerning submissions to Weird War, "we simply have too much inventory from the recent downshift in page count", which "has somewhat upset our plans for theme issues and book-lengthers." It's better than Cary Burkett's "as for Cinnamon, there are no definite plans at the moment, but keep your eyes peeled. You never can tell when she might pop up again!" Paul Levitz comments that the first dollar Detective was made by taking finished issues of Detective and Batman Family and trimming pages to fit the content together into one issue, while in Adventure #461 he even shows what the cover would have looked like before the JSA were added--it shows that an editor interested in fan communication can make an impression, and makes Jenette Kahn's lack of any in-book explanation quite inexcusable. What can ordinary readers be thinking? -Reg Uspatoff

fan-things

BY ED SALLIS

"The passing of October saw the death of one of the most dynamic forces in comic fandom. Only days after he'd single-handedly strung up Graeme Bassett for the mess made of MEDIA 12, Gregory X. Arachnius was found dead, a cryptic signature, "Mr B", on his forehead. Arachnius Productions has understandably been thrown into turmoil and after putting together the Christmas issue from plans left by GB and GA we had no choice but to dismiss the MEDIA commission. Thankfully, Phil Hall has found some other ***FUCKER*** fan to package MEDIA, none other than Nigel Balloch, who plans to turn MEDIA 'back into a proper adzine instead of the Broadmoor House Magazine.'"

Well, that's the latest communication from the House of Bassett -- a rough translation would be that the game of "Pass The Media" has been played again, and when the music stopped it was in the lap of Nige Balloch, as soon as the Christmas issue (#14) is out of the way. There's an ad for it in the new FANTASY TRADER--topics planned are hack horror comics, British TV cops, and an advance look at British Marvel's plans, behind a Pete Scott cover. MEDIA #12 is the current issue, though (22p for 28 A5 pages from Phil Hall)

with more insults per page then ever; Ms Glancy objected more to being called Katie than the suggestion that she ran a red light escort service, while Colin Campbell was rather put out to find it alleged his first name was Jim! It certainly made a change from ordinary fanzines, but I'm just as happy it won't be appearing every month in this form.

VERTIGO #3 is a make-or-break issue, and needs all the publicity it can get, co-editor Barry K. Winetrobe says--so here goes. By mistake in the last Bem this zine was confused with CEREBRO, of which more anon, but VERTIGO 16p by post

is the one that <u>isn't</u> all about the X-Men. Issue 3 has 28 unreduced A5 pages, and is what I'd call "a good read", with thought-provoking articles, a "What If Shakespearian Tragedy" on the perils of being a fanzine editor, letters, and the usual excellent comics reviews. Geoff Lindsey and Barry Winetrobe deserve to succeed with this zine, I feel--but that's up to fandom rather than little me. All I can say is that if fandom doesn't support up-and-coming fanzines like this, it will be the poorer for it.

On to GRAPHIC SENSE #3 (25p for 28 8½" x 10½" pages from Gez Kelly,

which is developing nicely, though I feel the format, with colour cover, is ahead of some of the contents at the moment. Contributors include Maureen James, Dick Domar (Gez's answer to me--welcome aboard, Dick!), Chris Ash with a cryptic comics crossword (e.g. "smelly letterer" --Ben ODA, geddit?), Theo Clarke, Phil Greenaway, and on the art side Pete Scott, Alan Hunter, and 14 others, and it's a nice mixture--if you like Bem and Panny, the chances are you'll like this fanzine too. All it needs is a good nickname... er...Graphy? I gather that the fourth issue will be out by the end of December, unless the printer decides to close for Christmas of course. Dave Edge reports that his strip "The Successors" is due to start with GS4, which should be good--it has been planned for quite a while, I see I was mentioning it back in Bem-8 as an ingredient of a zine Dave was planning, and since then it has nearly been published in at least two other fanzines! Keep your fingers crossed...

Just in case you thought Worcester could only support one fanzine, let me introduce COSMIC THEMES 25p for 36 A5 pages from Tony Callow,

it's an SF zine specialising in paperback reviews, with in the current 16th issue also an 8-page fantasy story by the editor; there's also material for Moorcock collectors.

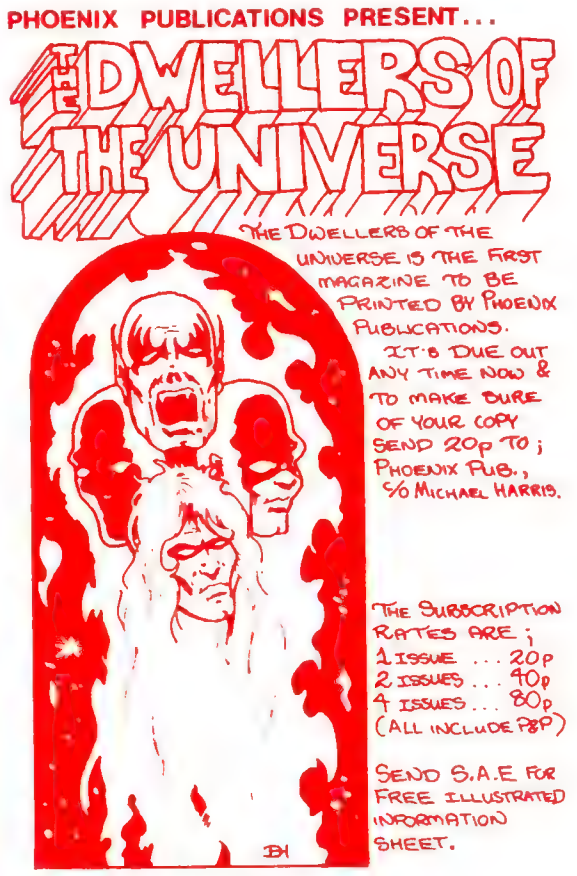
Staying with SF, ASTRON #3 30 A4 pages for 30p by post from Steven J. Green,

is now out, with a talk on time travel by SF author Bob Shaw, interviews of Joe Haldeman and Judy-Lynn del Rey, and words from John Brunner on the SF Worldcon (which is in Brighton from August 23rd to 27th 1979 -- all details from 14, Henrietta Street, London WC2), plus features. It's another enjoyable read, and I'm glad Steve was able to continue publishing this zine. Trying to appeal to both comics and SF fans is difficult--but it's to be applauded, the more inter-fandom communication the better!

Below is an ad for a new fanzine; what it will be like I don't know, but the information sheet has a very nice Dave Hornsby cover, and Dave is one of the main artists (along with Bob Watkins and Michael Harris) which, if you've seen his work here, in APOCALYPSE, and elsewhere should induce you to part with 20p. I'm in favour of superhero stripzines in theory, and this looks as if it could be a good one. I heard from Jonny Kurzman early in November that SUPER ADVENTURE stories #2 was almost complete, by the way, but "God knows how long the printers will take this time, though", he comments...

A new fanzine is planned by John Foster 28p for

which he wants a plug -- how'm I doing so far, John? He wants to feature a regular article, or essay, or even interview of about 1500 words in each issue, on any comic-related subject, and is relying on you lot to provide some--he also has need of spot illustrations, among other things. So if you want to contribute to a new zine (the name is "ARGENT VOID PRESS"), away you go!


PHOENIX PUBLICATIONS PRESENT...
THE DWELLERS OF THE UNIVERSE
THE DWELLERS OF THE UNIVERSE IS THE FIRST MAGAZINE TO BE PRINTED BY PHOENIX PUBLICATIONS.
IT'S DUE OUT ANY TIME NOW & TO MAKE SURE OF YOUR COPY SEND 20p TO; PHOENIX PUB., C/O MICHAEL HARRIS.
THE SUBSCRIPTION RATES ARE;
1 ISSUE ... 20p
2 ISSUES ... 40p
4 ISSUES ... 80p
(ALL INCLUDE P&P)
SEND S.A.E FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED INFORMATION SHEET.
BH

COMIC BINDERS ARE NOW AVAILABLE!

These high-quality binders have been produced solely with the comic-book collector in mind, and as such are a perfect way to look after treasured items. Not only can you neatly display them, but with the individual transparent (easily removable) files your comics are under excellent protection--and you can fit 2 comics per pocket.

Each binder holds at least 30 comics or more, depending on their format (the spine width is 3½"), and is supplied with 40 files, plus a sheet of gold letraset for "do-it-yourself" embossing on the spine for a ready-made index system, and full instalment instructions.

They have been ordered, and will be ready for mailing soon, @ £5 each; order three or more and take advantage of a 10% discount. Add to all orders £1 to cover carriage. (Cheques or postal orders please, to G. Kelly.) Money back guarantee if not completely satisfied.

These binders are something a lot of you have been asking for for a long time--I hope you'll like them now that they're here. -GEZ KELLY

THE EAST CLANDON GREAT WHALING DISASTER OF 1925 #4 20p for 16 A5 pages from Steve Craddock,

is a blast from the past--it contains some excellent material by Alan Hunter, Dave Harwood, editor Steve, and Bob Watford, presented in the way fanzines used to be done before the days of CMN, Bem, Panny, and the large-size FA. I'm not saying it's behind the times, just different; it's very well produced, I enjoyed it greatly. If it had kept to its nominal frequency, Martin points out to me, it would have published as many issues as Bem by now, and would presumably be radically different -- but get a copy, fannish history is made of zines like this, and if enough people buy copies it'll tempt Steve to get the next issue out within a year!

FANDOM #5 8 A5 pages from Eddie Walsh,

is basically a sales list for Eddie, whose shops are advertised in Bem on page 12; he is changing it into a fanzine though, presumably at this stage free for a stamped addressed envelope. This is really an introductory issue, but I <u>love</u> the title of the fanzine information column, sub-titled "A Look at the Others"--it's called "Sneer! Sneer!"

FRIENDS OF KILGORE TROUT MAGAZINE #3 40 A5 pages for 30 pence, cheques/postal orders made payable to "The Friends of Kilgore Trout Fanzine Fund",

is a good package, and more importantly lots of fun--with a speech by James White (from this year's Faircon) which is required reading for followers of his Sector General series, and lots more. I like the cover, Sandy--what's her phone number?

CEREBRO <u>is</u> all about the X-Men, being the organ of The X-Men Fan Club--send £3 to join for a year to Geoff Willmetts,

or 35p for Cerebro #2 (20 A4 pages), or an s.a.e. for the hard sell. If you like, love and live the X-Men, then this is the club for you, but it seems to me to be aimed at a younger group than most fanzines; it is interesting, with some pleasant art by Daves Freedman and Hornsby, and obviously has quite a dedicated and enthusiastic following -- but if I hear much more about the feud between Kathleen Glancy and Wolverine I'll stamp my foot!

Da Big Em included K-ZINE NEWS UPDATE in the batch of zines he sent along recently 2 A4 pages from K. Williams,

in which the scion of "Sigh" comments on the latest Marvel news. It seems to be an adjunct to the Phil Greenaway-masterminded apa that Keith, along with about half the fans you've ever heard of, belongs to, but I imagine the usual stamped, self-addressed envelope would secure you a copy. KW is thinking of starting his own regular fanzine, which seems to be a logical move; let's see what happens.

Another long-time Bem contributor is issuing a chemically-copied single-sheet fanzine; FANSHEET #1 1 A4 page for 1p + a 7p stamp, from Stephen Bailey,

fits as much into one page as one could expect, in a suitably informal manner. However, where Stephen goes from here is up to us; he only needs half-a-dozen or so contributors and FANSHEET will be a success.

And now the usual plug for FANZINE FANATIQUE 8 A5 pages for 10p + sae or trade for your zine from Keith and Rosemary Walker,

#32, which as usual has capsule reviews of well over 50 fanzines, which I find fascinating--all fan-eds should send Keith their zines, as FF gets around so much you may well get some international contacts!

THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION YEARBOOK (in good bookshops at £2.95 from Pierrot Publishing Ltd), compiled by Colin Lester, is an interesting book with lots of coverage of fandom, including comics--"our" section is on pages 381 to 386, but other bits of interest crop up regularly. It's an invaluable reference book -- how did we ever get along without it? It's not infallible, but it's just what we need--with lots of cartoons by Jim Barker, and nuggets of information about all aspects of SF and a dozen related interests.

ALNITAH is a Star Trek fictionzine 48 A4 pages for 95p from Margaret Draper,

that I always enjoy; and #8 has the bonus of an Alan Hunter cover. There are lots of trekzines around these days, mainly produced by women it seems, and some featuring a thinly disguised authoress seducing Mr Spock--but Alnitah is a well-balanced magazine, and the stories here feature Uhura and Kirk as well as everyone's favourite Vulcan, and there's even one story set at the time that Jim Kirk took over the Enterprise from Captain Pike; there's some good material here, worthy of being featured in the next "New Voyages" anthology.

LULU REVIEW ≠2 8 8½" x 11" pages from Pubbug Press Publications, Richmond, B.C., Canada V6X 1N8) is a North American equivalent to FANZINE FANATIQUE, but dealing mainly with comics fanzines, and types t and litho-printed--over forty fanzines are reviewed and graded here. What a lot of choice American fans have! Some of 'em are the slick zines that people like Colin Campbell stock, others I'd never heard of before, but there was a sad lack of coverage of British material--only Mike Cruden, who passed on his complimentary copy to me, has his last issue (≠27) of Fantas. Trader reviewed. It rated "4", or "fair", by the way. So I hope other British fan-eds will send their zines along, in the hope it'll bring some foreign exchange into our green and pleasant island; for the rest of us, an 8-issue subscription is $3 -- I'd suggest sending an international reply coupon, asking for details. One thing I found off-putting was the way each of the three reviewers called him/herself "Lulu", but other than that it was most enjoyable.

Staying overseas, the highest-placing American fanzine in the Bem Ballot, tying for fifth place with Fantasy Trader, was THE COMICS JOURNAL; ≠42 (68 8½ x 11" pages, for $1.25), available at comics shops and marts for 75 to 90 pence, has a John Byrne cover of Iron Man, Spider-Man, Thor, Hulk and Captain America toadying to Stan Lee, who is interviewed (sort of) inside; more interesting than selected highlights of a Lee campus lecture, however, is the review section, in which the post-Gulacy, pre-Zeck issues of MASTER OF KUNG FU are considered ("Enter the Drag"), the Gerber tenure of CAPTAIN AMERICA analysed, and DR STRANGE ANNUAL ≠1 considered by Paula O'Keefe and Christopher Melchert, in a manner similar to Christopher's DD review in Bem-21. Stan took up ten pages, while an interminable thirteen pages were devoted to the recent attempts by Neal Adams, Marshall Rogers and others to set up a Comics Guild (very worthy, and controversial, and important; but 13 pages?), and ads fill eighteen pages --however, columns and so on add a fair bit of diversity, covering The Comic Reader, "Elfquest", "Doonesbury", "Metamorphoses", and of course current comics news is "the icing on the cake". Not the best issue of TCJ I've read lately, but still worth its cover price.

And if you're a fan of animation (and in this house everything stops for Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, or Tom & Jerry), you may find FUNNYWORLD (52 8½" x 11" pages for $2.50) ≠17 interesting--I do, but I suppose that articles on the activities of the Disney Studio during World War II aren't everybody's cup of tea. Again, you'll find it in specialist comics shops, behind a Chuck Jones cover of the Warner characters--have a browse through, and see what you think.

I always find COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL 45p by post for 28 A4 pages from Richard Burton, difficult to review --I'm very much associated with Bem, and, in the friendliest possible way, CMNI is "the opposition", any unfavourable review could be held to be biased. However, I'll miss it if it does have to finish; and the current issue (≠38) has got a fan art superhero cover, which has to be a change for the better. The old problem of lack of space still applies, though; despite Mike Conroy not being able to contribute his review column (Les Chester takes over next time), Critique, Quotes, Comics Report, Distribution, and End Run were squeezed out at the last minute, and the promised Comicon '78 reports by Mike Cruden and Les Chester are held over to CMNI 39. Maybe devoting seven pages to a lavishly-illustrated (i.e. without illustrations it'd fit in 4½) interview with Paul Levitz had something to do with it? In the lettercol Richard sounds off against people calling CMNI a "professional-quality publication", and re-affirms that it is a fan-zine; well, I guess we should take his word for it, but I see no reason why it shouldn't be circulated widely enough to stop being "an amateur non-profit magazine", and, like Graphixus and such US zines as TCR, TBG and TCJ, make enough money to pay contributors and contribute something to its editor's budget? America's the main market for this sort of magazine, but with the air-freight contacts importers of specialist items have these days, the distribution would be no problem. But maybe it's too late to suggest this to CMNI? I hope I don't have to write its obituary in an issue or so.

But, from one end of the fanzine spectrum to the other; one of the members of Phil Greenaway's apa, known as papa to its friends, is David Lamb and, as well as his regular apazine, which rejoices in the name "The Yancy Street Journal Colour Supplement", he produces an A5 stripzine called CORE-MICKS -- and he's sent me a copy of the Christmas issue, which is a 20-page extravaganza called "The Wizard of WuZter" starring K. Williams in the Judy Garland part, Nige Edwards as the Straw Man, Maureen James as the Witch of the (wild) West, Mike Cruden as the Tin Man, Dave himself as the Cowardly Lion, Phil Greenaway as the head of the apakins, Rick Catilli as the mellow geek whose toad they have to follow (get it?), and our entangled editor as the Wizard. I enjoyed the whole silly concoction greatly--but whether or not you'll be able to follow the intrepid quartet to Fan-Dome and their encounter with the Wizard ("There were five of us Master Printers originally! Now there is only me!") I don't know--but a begging letter and a substantial bribe to Dave might do the trick. Dave has a genuine talent for caricature, and even if you're not familiar with the real people (I use the term loosely) involved, you should still find it very funny. Dave also wants me to mention that he's considering the publication of a funzine in the spring, and is after mini-strips, cartoons, full-length strips & articles that must be humorous, witty or satirical in content --hence the term "funzine". It sounds a good idea to me, and Dave deserves a prize of sorts if he thought up the term "funzine" himself. But then, who else would have the nerve?

AFTER IMAGE ≠1 18 A4 pages from Lewis Stringer, has a cover price of 12p, so I guess 20p ought to be about right for it by post. Like many first issues it is basically a one-man effort, which is no bad thing; four strips by Lew are the main strength. "War-Droid" is the first and the longest (5 pages), concerning a robot (not an android) warrior; I think I prefer the last and shortest (1 page) strip, though, "The Map", while the two humour strips are interesting too. There are short articles on TV fantasy and Judge Dredd too, and two pages of comics for sale--all in all, not a bad debut by any means.

Readers of FANTASY TRADER get a sample of Lew's "War-Droid" art, as he's got an ad for his zine there; since FT's printer was much quicker than usual, and I've got an extremely late deadline for this second page of Fan-Things, I've got a copy of FT 33 in front of me 12p for 16 A5 pages from Martin Lock, and I see that AFTER IMAGE isn't the only zine advertising in FT; MEDIA and FANSHEET I've mentioned, but I see that Trevor Hylton is in need of strips, articles, illos and reviews for a new fanzine called CAPTION, while issue 1 of DOOMZINE 20p + 7p stamp from Jonny White is now available, with articles on ERB and propaganda in comics, plus opinions, comics for sale, reviews, humour and more. Also in FT of course are some interesting lists of comics for sale, an opinion piece on "The Prisoner" by Mike Grace & Mike Cruden, "Boggo" by Paul Jay, and "Jughead and Me" by Pete Scott, with illos by Pete and Russ Nicholson, who also contributed the (two-colour!) cover. It seems to me a slightly messy print job around the edges in places, but everything's perfectly legible. And as Martin seldom fails to mention, it's free to all Bem's subscribers and contributors.

CROM ≠7 is about to appear, I'm assured by its editor Mark Bilsborough --but more on that next time, when I've seen it. If you want more details, send Mark an sae and more details you'll get!

In case my references to "A4" and "A5" have confused anybody, let me explain the European page sizes; A4 is around 8¼" wide by 11¾" high (21cm by almost 30cm), and A5 is almost 6" wide by 8¼" high. If you cut (or fold) an "A" size sheet in half across the middle, you get the next "A" size down; Bem's pages are A4, so the size of the sheets it's made from are A3; FT's pages are A5, so the sheets are A4.

And if that hasn't confused the rest of you, all I can say is, come back in three months and I'll give it another try -- now is that an offer you can refuse?

And yet more Fan-Things for the discerning reader; but I couldn't really finish without reminding the hold-outs among you that The Society of Comics Enthusiasts is well worth the £1 per year membership fee. One of the main attractions is that you get the monthly COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTERNATIONAL UPDATE, which these days includes the "Battlefield" letter column that used to be in F/A, without having to keep sending Colin Campbell stamped, self-addressed envelopes or (necessarily) buying his comics; and with it comes the society newsletter, THE SOCIETY REVIEW -- the fifth issue had 12 A4 pages reduced onto 3 A4 pages plus a striking same-size back cover, with lots of fanzine reviews, club reports, and letters. "The Society Awards for 1977" were announced, too; best writer and artist were Englehart and Starlin, while Will Eisner and the Spirit swept five categories (all-time writer was a tie with Chris Claremont, but all-time comics strip, all-time artist, and the title's revival as "most promising new development in the comics media in 1977" were his alone, along with "special award for outstanding contribution to the comics media"). Best fanzine of 1977 was a 3-way tie of COMICS UNLIMITED, PANELOLOGIST and BEM; favourite fan personality was the Wizard of WuZter.

The Society Advertiser, a fanzine sampler, a stripzine called KA-POW, a TSOCE amateur press association, a fannish convention to be called "Fancon"...follow the newsletter and see them progress!

The main fanzine of the Society is THE COMIC REVIEW, though; issue 6 is due out in January with Maureen James as editor 20p by post, or 10p to members, from Nigel Balloch,

it's got in its 32 A5 pages an editorial by somebody with the initials Martin Lock, Paul Jay's "Anthony the Budgie" strip, K. Williams on Killraven, K.F. Stubbs on the new X-Men, Loz Bowkett on Wonder Woman (well, you know what I mean!), Phil Greenaway's fanzine column, "Love Story?" by D. Telford, "Bob Monkhouse pt 2" by Dick Domar, "The Comic Code" by Dave Lamb, "Chris's Comments" by C. Ash, a lettercol, and an 11-page pantomime by Maureen James and Bill W. Ryan, a sequel of sorts to Bill's "A Christmas Shambles" in CU a year or two ago, illustrated by Chris Ash. Alan Austin plays Robin Hood, Dez Skinn the Sheriff of Nottingham, Maureen James is Maid Marion--and I won't tell you who are the actual "Babes in the Wood"! Er...I'm Friar Tuck, I gather...

When a new "Big Five" of comics fanzines is made up, I fully expect THE COMIC REVIEW to be on the list; it's recent progress is one more sign that T.S.O.C.E. is certainly well worth joining; I gather, by the way, that a new "Solarman" story by Bill Ryan, illustrated by Russ Nicholson, will be in TCR shortly.

And still fanzines keep coming in; PRISTINE MINT ≠4 (9 A4 pages for 14p from Ian Abrahams,

is stencil-printed and art-less, but a good step forward from ≠3; 3 pages of letters, and Mo James, Graham Bleathman and Mark Finch--whose WORLDS ≠10 16 A5 pages for 20p from Mark

arrived in the same post. Mark has introduced photo-reduced print this issue which, while not perfect on one or two pages, allows much more material; as well as features on "Supermarionation", "The Night Stalker", ufos, "2001", and other fantasy film material, the SF chronological review continues from 2000 (Metropolis, 2000 A.D.) to 2072 (Silent Running), a fanzine review column by John Matthews and an opinion column by Clair debut...and Bob Watkins has a 2-page strip.

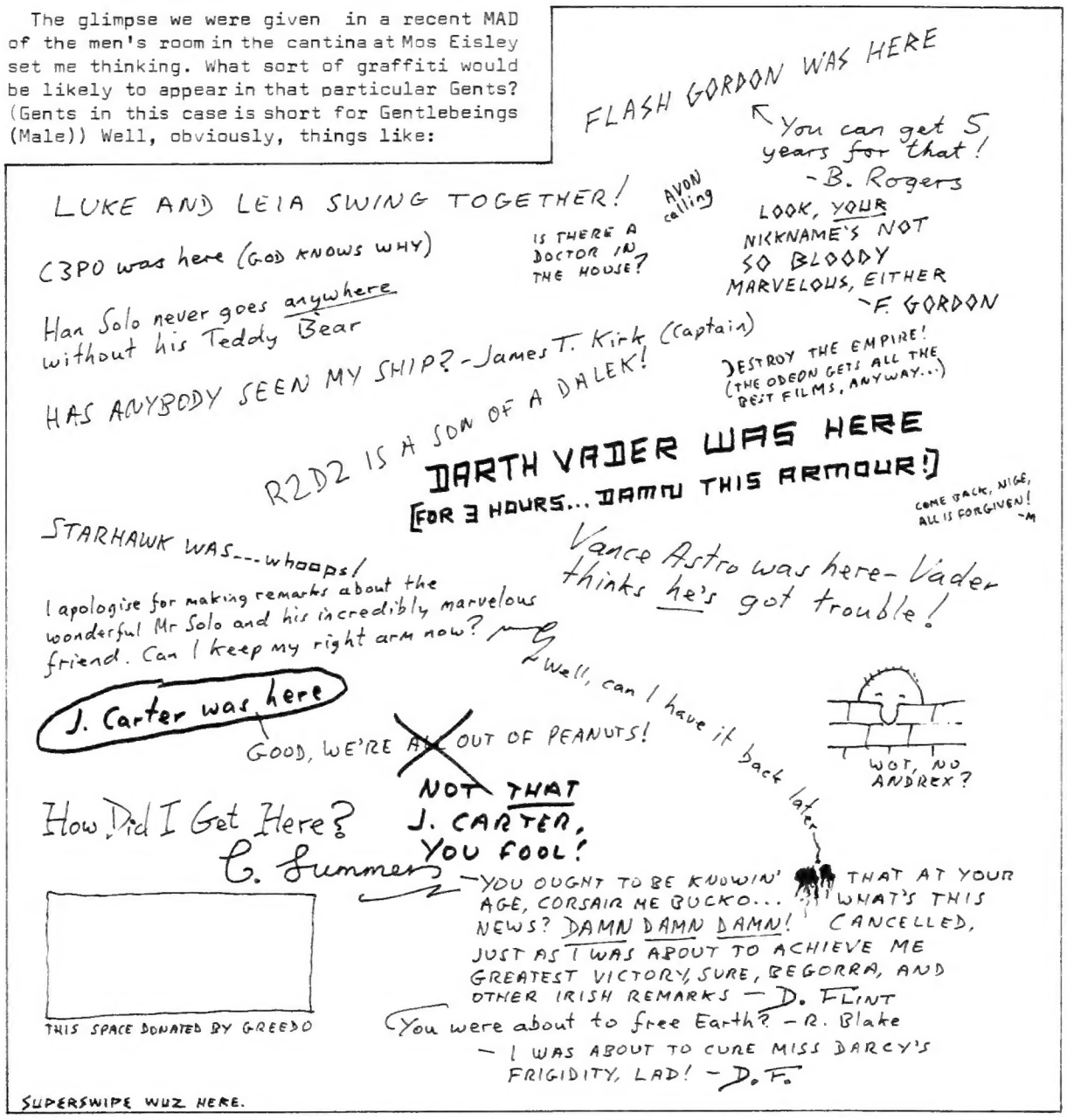
UNIFAN ≠1 14 A4 pages for trade or letter comment from Tohubohu Press,

is an lish-language SF fanzine featuring a sort SF story by Brian Aldiss and Philip José mer, thought up at a recent SF festival. IMENON ≠26 (£3/ten issues by sea from New land; British Agent Keith Walker of Fanzine ietique), on the other hand, is written in / Zealandish throughout. See what happens en you don't review Bem, Brian?

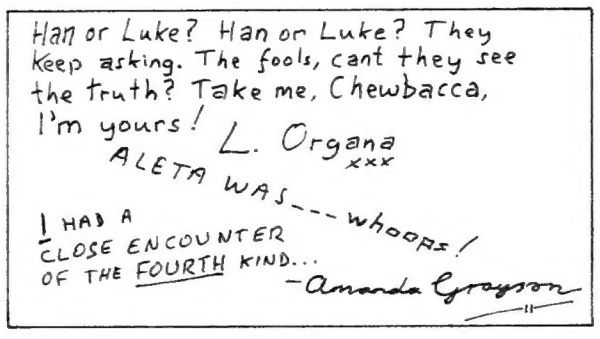
And that really is the lot for now; if you ve a zine you want me to see, just send a y in to the editorial address; a stapled-fiver is only optional! -ED SALLIS

KATHOLICITY

The glimpse we were given in a recent MAD of the men's room in the cantina at Mos Eisley set me thinking. What sort of graffiti would be likely to appear in that particular Gents? (Gents in this case is short for Gentlebeings (Male)) Well, obviously, things like:


FLASH GORDON WAS HERE
↖You can get 5 years for that! -B. Rogers
LUKE AND LEIA SWING TOGETHER!
AVON calling
C3PO was here (GOD KNOWS WHY)
IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?
LOOK, YOUR NICKNAME'S NOT SO BLOODY MARVELOUS, EITHER -F. GORDON
Han Solo never goes anywhere without his Teddy Bear
HAS ANYBODY SEEN MY SHIP? -James T. Kirk (Captain)
DESTROY THE EMPIRE! (THE ODEON GETS ALL THE BEST FILMS, ANYWAY...)
R2D2 IS A SON OF A DALEK!
DARTH VADER WAS HERE
(FOR 3 HOURS... DAMN THIS ARMOUR!)
COME BACK, NIGE, ALL IS FORGIVEN! -M
STARHAWK WAS---whoops!
Vance Astro was here- Vader thinks he's got trouble!
I apologise for making remarks about the wonderful Mr Solo and his incredibly marvelous friend. Can I keep my right arm now?
Well, can I have it back by 6/6?
J. Carter was here
GOOD, WE'RE ALL OUT OF PEANUTS!
WOT, NO ANDREX?
NOT THAT J. CARTER, YOU FOOL!
How Did I Get Here? C. Summers
-YOU OUGHT TO BE KNOWIN' THAT AT YOUR AGE, CORSAIR ME BUCKO... WHAT'S THIS NEWS? DAMN DAMN DAMN! CANCELLED, JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO ACHIEVE ME GREATEST VICTORY, SURE, BEGORRA, AND OTHER IRISH REMARKS -D. FLINT
THIS SPACE DONATED BY GREEDO
(You were about to free Earth? -R. Blake
- I WAS ABOUT TO CURE MISS DARCY'S FRIGIDITY, LAD! -D.F.
SUPERSWIPE WUZ HERE.

While over in the Gentlebeings (Female):


Han or Luke? Han or Luke? They keep asking. The fools, cant they see the truth? Take me, Chewbacca, I'm yours! L. Organa xxx
ALETA WAS---whoops!
I HAD A CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE FOURTH KIND... -Amanda Grayson

Amanda Grayson is no relation to Robin the Teen Wonder; she's Mr Spock's mother.

In the latest Wonder Woman, someone advocates the setting up of a "Women's Society of America", and is told that WW is an advocate of equal rights, and couldn't join a segregated organisation. She's come a long way, baby. From the start of her career, and all through the Golden Age, her comic was easily the most sexist on the market--since the term applies equally to those who advocate female superiority. I've been extracting some facts from Michael Fleisher's Wonder Woman Encyclopedia, and the attitude is consistent throughout. Men are demeaned by being given names like Count Crafti, Lord Cruelo, Patro Debum, Doctors Fiendo, Frenzi and Psycho, and my personal favourite, Guigli del Slimo. Female villains, with the possible exception of Ms Gell Osey, have fairly euphonious names. Men are shown as unfit to rule. We meet 21 female monarchs, who are all wise, kind, and brave. Some of them keep male slaves, but who cares about that? Of the 8 evil queens we encounter, 4 reform. 23 evil male rulers are, with the sole exception of the god Mars, thrown from their thrones and firmly prevented from keeping female slaves. One of them subsequently reforms -- through the love of a good woman. The 9 good male rulers are all uxorious /(it means "excessively fond of one's wife" -ed)/ husbands or devoted lovers (not in that sense). Women are portrayed as all too fit to rule. So long as authority is loving, and female, submission is fun, is the message. Wonder Woman says it herself: "Isn't it more fun to make the man obey?" And, about her own sex: "If girls want to be slaves, there's no harm in that. The bad thing for them is submitting to a master or to an evil mistress -- a good mistress could do wonders with them." There is not, you will perceive, such a thing as a good master. Eat your heart out, Tarl Cabot.

I hate to have to say it, but I have to. In this one instance only, Dr Frederic Wertham may have had the right of it. -KATHLEEN GLANCY

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If you live in the Midlands or the North of England and can't always make it to London for every mart then the Birmingham Comic Mart is the place to go. The Comic Mart is held in the Malvern Suite on the second floor, where you will find all the latest import comics and those hard to find back issues.

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Please enclose an S.A.E. with your booking, cheques and postal orders should be made payable to Peter Lennon. Phone enquires on Redditch 20384.

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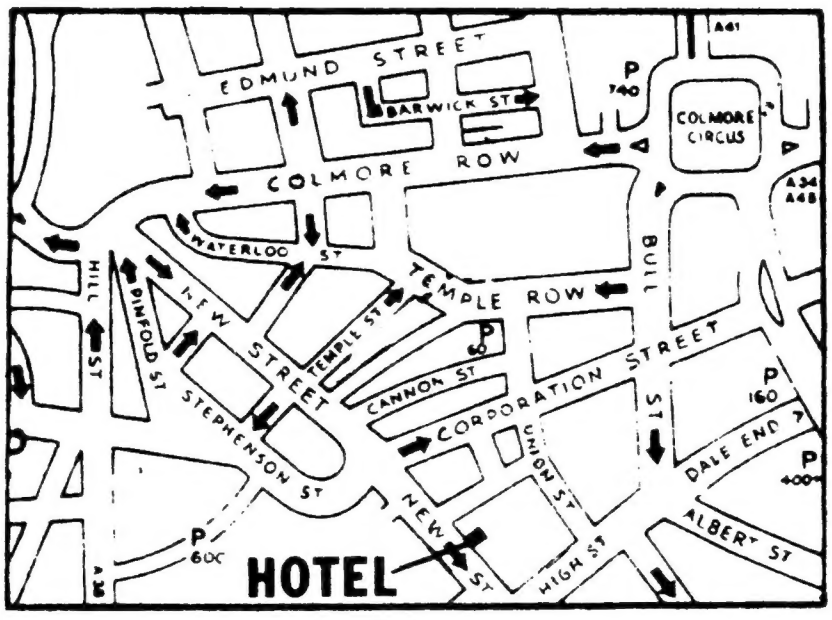


HOW TO GET THERE

The Birmingham Centre Hotel is situated right in the centre of town and is just a few minutes walk from New Street railway station and the city's central bus depot. Cars can be parked in a number of multi-storey car parks near the hotel. These car parks are indicated on the map above by the letter P.

UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES

The backbone of the British comics scene is the weekly comics published by the International Publishing Corporation, D.C. Thomson, Marvel Comics International, Polystyle Publications, & Independent Television Publications. I do not intend to do a survey of all the titles being published at the moment; this time, I'd like to talk about some of my favourite strips.

LOOK-IN features eight strips; "Famous Five" is quite well-drawn, while Martin Asbury's work on "The Six Million Dollar Man" is as inventive and bold as I've come to expect from him -- but John Bolton's work on "The Bionic Woman" is hard to compete with. With colours and paper at his disposal even the Marvel Super Specials and Heavy Metal couldn't better, John is really doing the best adventure comics art around; every panel is a picture, without hurting the narrative flow, and a beautiful picture at that. The likenesses are excellent, backgrounds beautiful--sometimes the black outline to a figure seems a bit too heavy to my eyes, but I'm sure there's a good reason for this. It's a shame that John Bolton's talents are being used on a TV tie-in strip, I feel, however; in a year or two the television show will be forgotten, and it's likely the strip will be gone, too. It would be difficult to interest any book publisher in reprinting the strip version of a defunct TV show...and that's a shame, as this sort of art deserves to be collected into a book. And the stories on this strip are quite good, too.

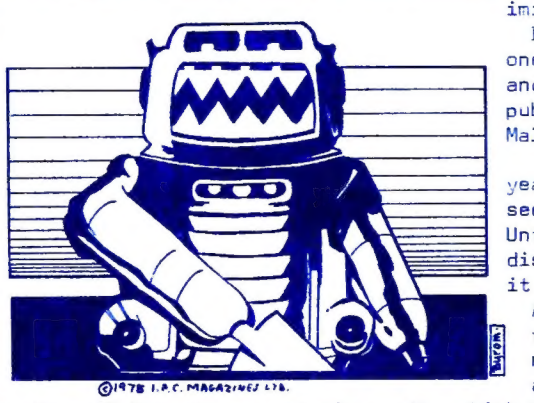
BULLET I read, though none of the stories strike me as particularly inspired in art or story--I live in hope, but if I have to cut back, this title would be among the first to go. I even buy one humour title, CHEEKY, which features some genuinely funny work, including Robert Nixon's absurd, ludicrous "Elephant On The Run", and "Cheeky's Week" by Frank McDiarmid, which has a weird collection of jokes and puns. And at present of course STAR WARS WEEKLY is printing the stories of Luke, Leia & Company before the monthly title in America (though when you read this, material edited by Richard Burton from the 3 pages per month PIZZAZZ has featured for the last year)--I wonder if American fans know they're getting in effect reprints from the British weekly? The work by Goodwin and Infantino can hardly be what I'd call a British strip, though.

BATTLE-ACTION has, and has featured recently, some interesting strips; "Dredger", drawn by John Cooper, was an intelligent, fast-moving spy strip far superior to the version that had battled in ACTION before the merger; "Johnny Red", set in Russia in World War II, gives an uncompromisingly realistic view of the battles there, with as hero a fugitive British fighter pilot; and half the squad of "The Sarge" have died over the last few weeks, although this strip has in the past had a tendency towards the "Sergeant Rock Syndrome", where a rifle can bring down enemy aircraft and one grenade, if thrown by the hero, can take out two tanks, a pillbox, and a machine-gun nest. A more straight-forwardly flippant view of 939-945 is given in "Crazy Keller", with an American Captain of that name and Corporal "Aerial" Arkin scooting about Europe in a jeep with casual disregard for top brass, front lines, and private property. The Germans are a touch slow on the uptake, with a healthy appreciation for the finer things of life like paintings and gold--but then, so are most of the Americans! I can imagine the captain and his corporal stopping by at the M.A.S.H. camp--Aerial meets Radar?--for a little bit of black market business... All in all, B-A is an interesting title, not as limited as one might expect a "war comic" to be.

2000 A.D. AND STARLORD, besides being a bit of a mouthful to say, is the best of the British weekly comics, and will probably continue to be despite I.P.C.'s upcoming TORNADO, and the long-rumoured new D.C. Thomson SF title. They seem to have just about phased out the "Future Shocks", which, since very little original can be expected in less than 2 pages; that leaves four strips, at present "Judge Dredd", "Strontium Dog", "Flesh Book II", and "Ro-Busters". Five or six pages a week gives more room than the more usual two or three pages--but I wish there was room in the comic for more stories! The merger of the two titles squeezed out one of my favourites, "Robo-Hunter", by T.B. Grover & Ian Gibson, and also put out "Dan Dare" to take a rest, while Star Lord's excellent "Mind Wars" came to a rather quicker conclusion than Alan Hebden and Redondo had planned. If I was planning the comic, and had the pages, I'd feature "Robo-Hunter", "Ro-Busters", "Judge Dredd", "Mind Wars", yet another new look for "Dan Dare", "Timequake", "Strontium Dog", a slot to showcase new short series, and of course "Walter". But with the current number of pages, all they have to do is replace "Flesh Book II" with "Robo-Hunter" and I'll be happy!

It's to 2000 A.D.'s credit that no strip has appeared in every issue; some features have been rested, only to re-appear in an improved form ("Dan Dare", and "Harlem's Heroes" turning into "Inferno"), and some have, I hope, disappeared for good. Megacity One's best lawman has got pretty close to a 100% record though, since he, Judge Dredd, has been in every issue from number two on; it couldn't happen to a more worthy character. The idea of patrolling policemen dispensing instant justice may not be new, but it's a good one, making Dredd more effective then an ordinary detective; and putting him on a beautiful great motorcycle was an excellent move. Some of the plots he found himself involved with in his early days needed to be approached with tongue firmly in cheek, but when the long continued Dredd sagas began, the strip really caught fire. I must take time out to re-read the "Robots Revolt" multi-parter some time; both the "Cursed Earth" and "Lunar City" series tended to side-track themselves, entertaining though they were. The current tale of the power-crazed chief judge owes more than a little to the recent TV airing of "I claudius", with Judge Cal intent on proving his name's short for Caligula, but still stands up well on its own--no chance that Dredd will develop a C-C-Claudius type stammer, though! And let us not forget the art, by such worthies as Ian Gibson, Mike McMahon and Brian Bolland--when an episode is by a less appropriate artist, such as Kev O'Neill or Brett Ewins, you learn to appreciate the more powerful styles of Dredd's top trio. Dredd is one of the major successes of British comics, and the idea of giving him his own title must have occurred to his I.P.C. editors. It would prosper, I am sure--but his old comic wouldn't be the same if he left.

But that's enough about weekly titles; now on to Dez Skinn, the newly-arrived brains behind British Marvel, an organisation that has been sadly lacking in that department up to now. The most popular comics publisher in America, with a large ready-made market for its product, vast amounts of excellent comic material, a plethora of exciting heroes, hits the British publishing scene...and after six years is only hanging on because to stop would be to admit defeat? "Star Wars" was a stroke of luck, the other remaining two weeklies both operate with a circulation half that at which I.P.C. or D.C. Thomson would say "Great News, Lads! Your paper's joining forces with "Whizzer and Chips" next week so look for all your favourites there!" But now, on his trusty white charger up rides Sir Dez, with his faithful squires Alan McKenzie & Richard Burton--and he's already brought his distinctive trademark to the Marvel line. To wit, RAMPAGE #6, his first issue, is late! The next change shows he's either incompetent or Marvel have been lying to us for years, as he's made it "rampage magazine starring The HULK", the last four letters dwarfing everything else on the cover--I thought having two comics called "Hulk" would confuse the newsagents too much? Inside, judging by the Dez Skinn editorial, most of the changes are due next issue, with Nova finishing, replaced by Dr Strange -- and the Bill Bixby interview from Hulk Magazine #10 is also promised. Dez comments coyly that Nova will be "coming back very soon--on M-Day." There's no doubt that Dez has got some interesting plans for new material and new titles, I hope that he will be allowed time to experiment and to introduce an element of originality into what has been an all too easily predictable operation. However, the world being what it is, any bets on "M-Day" and "Mighty Marvel is Growing Places" faring any better than "The DC Explosion" or any other radical change? That note of pessimism aside, I look forward to having a good excuse for buying the weeklies...



The other early moves in Dez's campaign involve getting a new "computer" named C.Y.R.I.L. in to answer letters (as programmed by Richard Burton) in STAR WARS WEEKLY, and bringing Red Sonja in as a regular strip in SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, as of issue 13. STARBURST is also a Marvel magazine as of issue 4, due out two weeks ago as I write, but probably not altered greatly by its change of publisher.

LOOK AND LEARN is currently reprinting 2 pages a week in full colour of "The Trigan Empire" by Mike Butterworth & Don Lawrence from nine or ten years ago--but if 10p a page is too high a price for this excellent strip, if you lash out £2.95 you get 192 pages from 1965-68 in a Hamlyn hardback, 9" by 11½". The first 77 pages are exactly the same as the 1973 "Look And Learn Book of the Trigan Empire", except that it had a better cover than this new Star Wars-influenced one, but from then on the adventures aren't edited in the heavy way of the earlier book--as the expanses of white paper where the title and half-page ads used to be testify! Even if you have the earlier book, which had become rather expensive and hard to come by, you still get over 100 pages of fine art and story; "The Trigan Empire", as this new book so aptly calls itself, would make a very good Christmas present... Drop a few hints.

One format not used all that much in the U.K. is the digest--except for those interminable war picture libraries and a slightly smaller flow of romance titles. However, Disney collectors have been happy to snap up a monthly title, DONALD DUCK FUN LIBRARY, which gives 96 4-colour pages of Disney fun, plus a free "fun sticker" for 45p. This is printed in Italy, where the Disney gang of characters are extremely popular and there are quite a number of monthly Disney digests, so many in fact that America can't produce enough material--consequently, some of the strips here are getting their first English-language publication. It's much easier to collect and store than the 12p Mickey Mouse Weekly, too!

Traditionally, the British comics market has concentrated on weekly titles, cheaply produced on poor quality paper, designed to be read and discarded; the American market has gone in more for monthly titles, which gives more time for preparation and more time for selling, and has given rise to a much more collectable type of comic. Any move towards monthly titles in this country makes me happy. CASTLE OF HORROR, TALES OF TERROR, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, RAMPAGE, NEAR MYTHS, TRUE WAR, DONALD DUCK FUN LIBRARY, I wish them all well. Could Star*Lord be revived as a monthly title? Could Marvel UK start a few more monthlies, even a British edition of CRAZY? Could NEAR MYTHS succeed well enough to spawn a few imitators?

But there's only room for one more magazine this time; and GRAPHIXUS MAGAZINE, now published ten times a year by Mal Burns

(and a year's subscription is £7.75) seems a good note to end on. Unfortunately, its British distribution is limited, and it continues mainly because American and continental fans are quicker to recognise a good thing than we are. Issue 5 is a good 75 pence's worth, which is just as well as that's what it costs. There's a 9-page strip by Angus McKie, who also draws for Heavy Metal and book covers, a 10-page adaptation of Harry Harrison's "The Streets of Ashkelon" by Brian Bolland (a reprint, but of a very limited-edition zine), a 5-pager by Mike Matthews, and other stuff too various to mention, all put into a very slick package. It's "adults only", but that apart it should appeal to most people--it's nice that it is possible to put together this sort of zine in this country.

-RUAN LANIHORNE

AR:ZAK COMIX

Drawings by Chris Welch, Suzy Varty, Nick Kavanagh, Tony Schofield, David Noon, Hunt Emerson, Pokkettz, Steve Bell, Szostek.

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